

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Steve Pearson
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home provides short-break care and accommodation for up to six young people. The home is run by a local authority and is registered to care for young people with learning disabilities.

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 **adequate**.

Staffing absences in recent months have led to significant challenges for the management and day to day running of the home. An aggravating factor is that two of the three full-time management positions have not been filled since they became vacant two months ago. Nevertheless the home has not had to reduce the level of support to families and young people and staff feel supported by the acting manager.

The arrangements to promote young people's safety are sound. Health and safety are given a high priority and there is a systematic approach to ensure risks are managed safely. Risk assessments are comprehensive, up to date and easy to understand. Despite the intention to do so, the registered persons have not made a referral to a statutory body necessary in order to promote the safety of children in the care sector.

Residential placement plans are easy to understand and comprehensive. This helps the staff to be clear about young people's needs and about their role in meeting them. For young people who are older and preparing to leave in the near future, development plans are not sufficiently detailed.

The home is well-maintained and young people enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities, trips and holidays.

There is insufficient oversight and support for temporary staff because they are not receiving annual appraisals or formal, recorded supervision. Ofsted has been unable

to monitor significant concerns effectively because the registered persons did not inform the regulator about a significant complaint in a timely manner.

Monitoring of the quality of care is not sufficiently robust. It failed to identify a significant shortfall which Ofsted identified at this inspection. Four months ago, following an investigation, a decision was made to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service. By the time of the inspection the referral had still not been made. Both the internal and external monitoring failed to identify and report on this shortfall and the broader circumstances relating to it.

Although there are cumulative weaknesses in leadership and management, their impact does not have a significant impact on the overall quality of care provided for children.

As a result of the current inspection there are four requirements and four recommendations.

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
30 (2001)	notify Ofsted without delay if any of the relevant events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 takes place. In particular this means any serious complaint made about the home (Regulation 30)	01/10/2013
4 (2001)	ensure the children's home is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its Statement of Purpose. In particular this means employment of an assistant manager and a senior residential child care worker (Regulation 4(6))	18/10/2013
28 (2001)	ensure information, documents and records relating to each child, as specified in Schedule 3, are kept up to date. In particular, this relates to a record of the dates and results of any review of the placing authority's plan for the care of the child, or of their placement plan (Regulation 28 (1))	01/12/2013
34 (2001)	maintain a system for monitoring the matters in Schedule 6 and improving the quality of care. This relates to evaluating actions arising from those events listed in Schedule 5, specifically ensuring that any necessary referral to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 2(1)(a) of the Protection of Children Act 1999 has been completed. (Regulation 34, schedule 6, item 10)	18/10/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the procedures for responding to allegations and suspicions of harm are in line with Government guidance and requirements including the duty to refer information to statutory bodies including the Disclosure and Barring Service (NMS 20.6)
- ensure the short break care plan for each child includes that information which is necessary in order to promote good outcomes. In particular this means that development plans must be adequately detailed for those young people preparing for transition to adult services (Statutory guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks, para 2.20)
- maintain a written or electronic record detailing the time and date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, in particular those who work at the home on a temporary basis. The record is to be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of each supervision session (NMS 19.5)
- ensure all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. In particular this refers to temporary staff. (NMS 19.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Over time, young people gain confidence and become more independent. The contribution of the children's home to such progress is not readily identifiable. Consequently, the management team is seeking to ensure development goals for each young person are clearer so that progress can be evaluated more accurately. Young people gain an understanding of their background and a sense of identity because the staff complete a memories book with them. This is a record of times, places and events they have experienced while being cared for at the home. They receive this to keep at the end of their stay and it provides a record of their time at the home which they can look back on when older.

Young people gain social skills and a sense of belonging because they take part in activities in the community with other young people. For example, one young person said, 'I like coming here because I can go to the youth club.' Each young person tends to stay at the home on the same night of the week and so meets with similar peers on each occasion. This helps them to feel a sense of friendship and familiarity which brings a sense of security.

Young people make progress with their education. The staff support them with transport to and from school. They gain a sense of continuity through the use of a home to school communication book. This enables teachers and care staff to communicate about each young person on a daily basis. The young people also gain

skills in communication as the staff use the same systems as those used in the schools.

Young people feel settled because they can maintain contact with their families. They also feel supported by having a key worker who takes a special interest in promoting their wishes and needs.

Quality of care

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

Young people have a significant say in how the home operates and in their own care. For example, one young person said, 'We get to choose the food that we like and the cook makes it for us the next time we are here.' The young people also have regular house meetings at which they are encouraged to express their views about the home. The staff monitor children's attendance at the meetings and adjust the dates to ensure every young person has the opportunity to attend a meeting regularly. Young people behave well and they get on well with each other and with the staff. There is a high level of consistency in the care provided so that young people experience little change from one stay to the next.

The home provides a healthy environment. For example, the department of environmental health has awarded a top rating to the food hygiene arrangements; effective links are in place with specialist nursing advisors and the staff are appropriately qualified in administering medication and first aid.

Young people enjoy an excellent range of leisure activities and holidays. One young person said, 'I like it here because we go out on trips.' Another said, 'We went to London for a holiday and it was great.' There is also a very wide range of leisure activities within the house and outside in the garden. Young people enjoy using the adventure playground and sensory garden.

The home is well maintained, clean and homely. Young people receive homemade nutritious meals and two cooks are employed to provide meals every day including weekends.

Young people's needs are described clearly in residential placement plans. These are up to date and comprehensive. The plans help the staff to be clear about each young person's day-to-day needs and about their role in meeting these needs. Each young person has a key worker who helps to keep the plans up to date. The plans clearly explain young people's cultural and religious needs. This helps them to maintain and develop their own sense of identity. Each young person also has a development plan. The purpose of these plans is to make clear the specific goals which each young person is aiming to meet. For some young people, especially those who are older, the development plans are not well defined or up to date. This makes it less likely that young people are gaining the full benefit from their time at the home. They are also likely to be less well prepared for their transition to adult services.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people behave well and the staff use a reward scheme which is effective in promoting good behaviour. The staff rarely need to restrain young people, and when they do so it is only to ensure their safety. The staff record these occasions appropriately which provides for full accountability.

Young people feel safe. For example, one young person said, 'I feel safe and there isn't any bullying.' They do not go missing and there is a robust procedure to follow if this does happen. Risk assessments for each young person are clear, comprehensive and up to date. They are easy to follow and therefore enable the staff to be clear about any hazards that young people may face and how risks are to be reduced.

The premises are also safe. Professional technicians regularly service the electrical equipment, lifting equipment, gas appliances and equipment for preventing, detecting and extinguishing fires. Young people also take part in fire drills and the staff ensure that each of them has had this experience. Appropriate recruitment arrangements are in place which help to ensure that staff employed to work with children are suitable.

Following an incident relating to child protection, an investigation was carried out. As a result of this a decision was made four months ago to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service. However, the referral has still not been made.

Leadership and management

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

At the previous inspection Ofsted judged that the home was making satisfactory progress and made three recommendations. The shortfalls have now been addressed. As a result, risk assessments are more clear and informative and so the arrangements to promote safety are more robust. The house is now in a good state of décor as the outside has been repainted. New staff are supported better now because they complete their induction to the required standard within six months of starting employment.

Before young people come to stay at the home they receive a clear children's guide. This gives them all the relevant information they need to know about the children's home. The home also has a Statement of Purpose which sets out the function of the home and how it operates. This document explains that the management structure of the home comprises the Registered Manager, an assistant manager and a senior residential childcare worker.

Management arrangements at the home are weakened because two of these three management positions are vacant. The Registered Manager became absent through sickness three months ago. Consequently the assistant manager has become the acting manager and has applied for registration. Their vacated position of assistant manager has not been filled. The senior residential childcare worker resigned two months ago and their position has also not been filled. Although some part-time support has been provided, this does not match the management input provided by

these full-time vacant positions.

The home is appropriately resourced and an appropriate annual development plan is in place. This helps to maintain a focus on the direction of the home and development targets that are to be met. Internal and external monitoring of the quality of care takes into account the views of young people, their parents and relatives, and placing social workers. However, the monitoring is not sufficiently thorough. Following an investigation, a decision was made to make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service. Four months later, the referral has still not been made. This shortfall and the broader circumstances relating to it were not identified or reported on in any of the internal or external monitoring reports.

The management team is developing a more systematic approach to demonstrate the impact that the home has had on young people's lives and how their life chances have improved over time. Currently, young people's development plans are not always complete or up to date and the outcomes of reviews are not readily available. Young people's care needs are reviewed every six months. There is a lack of accountability because the recording charts in their files are not being kept up to date to reflect this frequency of review.

Ofsted is not able to safely monitor how well the home is responding to significant events. This is because the registered persons do not always inform Ofsted quickly enough when such an event. This relates to a serious complaint received by the home which was not then communicated to Ofsted in a timely manner.

Young people are cared for by an appropriate number of staff who are all qualified and who receive good levels of training. Despite some members of staff leaving since the previous inspection, part-time staff and temporary staff have provided cover and so the level of service to young people and their families has been maintained. Temporary staff are not provided with sufficient support or oversight. Although they receive regular individual support from the Registered Manager and acting manager, their supervision is not recorded formally, nor do they receive annual appraisals. This is of importance as temporary staff make a significant contribution to the running of the home.

Cumulatively, the shortfalls in leadership and management are significant. However, the acting manager has a clear vision of what needs to be done with appropriate support. Additionally, throughout the staffing difficulties of the recent months, the staff say the acting manager has supported them very well.

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.