

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC035387
Inspector	Nicholas Murphy
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered manager	Stephen Martin McGill / Alan Keith Powles
Date of last inspection	11/03/2014

Inspection date	30/10/2014
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Previous inspection	satisfactory progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	there has been no enforcement action since the last inspection

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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The home provides a safe and nurturing environment for young people, most of who have been admitted in an emergency. The standard of care gives young people stability at a time in their lives when they have experienced uncertainty and anxiety. A social worker said, 'staff show a caring attitude and are available for the young people. Staff actually care about the young people, it's not just a job for them. They understand the aims and work to achieve what's best for the young person.' As a result, good outcomes are achieved, with many young people moving successfully into stable long-term placements or returning home.

Staff give young people as much say as possible in the day-to-day running of the home. They are able to make choices in such areas as menus, the home's décor and activities. The short term remit of the home does not prevent young people from being able to enjoy experiences like holidays to London. Young people value the quality of relationships with staff and this helps them to make progress.

Young people feel safe in the home. Some come to live at the home with entrenched behaviour patterns which place them at risk, such as drug use, or going missing. However, many make positive improvements in their lifestyle during their time in placement. One young person said, 'one member of staff has helped me to on the

road to stopping smoking.'

The home is soundly managed. Staff are well trained and supported in often challenging work. Some shortfalls in care planning detract from the overall standard of care. Other recommendations have been made in relation to management oversight and food safety. However, the overall quality of the home is evident and this helps young people to move into more permanent living arrangements on a positive footing.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The children's home is provided by a local authority and provides accommodation for up to six young people who may have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The home's particular remit is to provide short to medium term care, often to young people who are admitted in emergency.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
11/03/2014	Interim	satisfactory progress
13/08/2013	Full	good
16/01/2013	Interim	good progress
01/08/2012	Full	adequate

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

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a domestic setting, specifically that refrigerated packets of food, once opened, are labelled with the date of opening (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that each child's Placement Plan 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, specifically that the plan is complete, up to date, and that the views of the child are recorded (NMS 25.2)
- put a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping, specifically to ensure that young people's plans and summaries of progress are up to date and all required information is present. (NMS 22.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Young people have good relationships with each other and with staff. Most present as confident and articulate and have a good understanding of the events in their lives which have led to them coming to live in the home. In general, young people are in good health. They attend appointments to check on and promote their well-being, including annual health assessments and those with dentists and opticians. Young people who are sexually active know how to access services to help them keep protected. Some young people choose to smoke or to use substances, but again, they have the information to make their own lifestyle choices. Some have made positive changes as a result of this information.

Young people who are currently living in the home are all engaged in full time education or training, or about to start. Most are motivated to do well, and understand the value of qualifications in enabling them to make positive career choices. Some young people who have recently moved on have done exceptionally well in their GCSEs, one achieving 13 passes at good grades.

All young people maintain contact with families, with some re-establishing relationships which had broken down. Although most have overnight stays with parents and other family members, some young people have legal conditions preventing this. In these cases staff support young people in challenging such conditions in order to promote successful rehabilitation.

Young people take advantage of the opportunities the home provides to develop skills they will need when they live independently. In addition to practical skills like budgeting and cooking, young people acquire resilience and belief in their abilities to cope alone. Many young people who have moved on are in settled situations where they continue to make progress. The home tracks the progress of young people who have left and continues to offer support to them on a planned basis in liaison with social workers and parents.

Quality of care **adequate**

There is a good and happy atmosphere within the home. Young people enjoy spending time with staff and exchanging banter. In general, young people behave well, and have consideration for the needs of others.

There are regular young people's meetings where they can express their views and make choices about the day-to-day running of the home. These meetings are timed to take place just before the staff meeting. This means that the staff group can

consider what the young people are saying promptly and make changes as necessary. It is notable that the home provides a range of activities and holiday opportunities for the young people even though their placements are time-limited. This demonstrates the commitment of staff to making young people's experience in the home as stimulating and rewarding as possible. The staff celebrate young people's achievements and mark the occasion of their moving out of the home with a party. Young people leave with a 'memory box' of photographs recording their time here. This enables them to look back on their stay with fondness and promotes a positive self-image.

Staff create individual care plans for each young person, linked to objectives contained in the local authority plan. Key workers have regular one-to-one time with young people, where they discuss aspects of the care plan and how best to achieve targets which have been set. However, the plans themselves do not consistently provide evidence of the involvement of young people, or others such as parents and social workers, in the planning process. Furthermore, although there are monthly summaries of the progress that young people are making, some are not updated by key workers and so do not reflect the current situation for the young person. This obstructs the ability of staff to implement young people's plans consistently.

Staff work hard to promote the health of young people. They ensure that each aspect of a young person's health is assessed shortly after coming to live in the home. This enables any deficits, such as poor dental health or eyesight, to be remedied. The home has good links with agencies which promote young people's health, including those which address smoking, sexual health and substance use. Two of the staff are trained in the provision of contraceptive advice. This enables them to provide accurate information to young people and signpost them to services in the community if necessary.

The arrangements to provide medication are detailed and well understood by staff. Those young people who are deemed capable of keeping and administering their own medicines can do so. Young people enjoy the food in the home, and have a say in menu planning. Special diets, such as vegetarian, are easily accommodated.

The home is clean and well maintained. Given the high turnover of young people in the home, this is commendable. It demonstrates the commitment of the staff and the registered provider to maintaining high standards, and shows young people that they are valued. A social worker said, 'there is a genuine effort to make the home as comfortable as possible and repair damage or replace worn furniture promptly.' There is one shortfall in this area; an opened packet of meat in the fridge was not labelled with the date of opening. This presents a risk of food being unsafe to eat.

All staff understand the importance of education to young people, particularly those who are often in crisis at the time of coming to live in the home. They recognise the value of maintaining the continuity of school placement as a key element in stabilising a young person. In addition, the home has one member of staff who has

special responsibility for liaising with schools and training providers. This approach has paid dividends in ensuring not only that young people have excellent attendance, but have also achieved good, and sometimes outstanding, results.

Keeping children and young people safe good

The home's policies to keep young people safe from harm are well understood by staff, including those who work in a support capacity. This means that any concerns expressed by young people will be addressed promptly and notified where necessary to the appropriate agencies. Young people have confidence in staff to act on any worries they may have. One said, 'if I have any troubles I know I can talk to any of the staff.' Staff have had recent training about the threats to young people from the internet and social media, and give information about this to each young person when they come to live in the home.

The home keeps a record of any bullying incidents, and sets the threshold for what it considers to be bullying commendably low. Bullying is a standing agenda item in each young people's meeting. The high profile that staff give to this issue results in a culture where bullying is rare and young people, in general, treat each other with tolerance and respect. Young people have a key to their bedrooms and so know that their belongings are secure. This contributes to the feeling of safety which all young people express without reservation.

There are a relatively high number of episodes where young people leave the home without authority or return late. However, the staff work within a well-established multi-agency framework which identifies those episodes (and young people) that are more risky than others. This enables appropriate action to be taken in each case to keep young people safe and return them as soon as possible. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of missing episodes for some young people who are particularly vulnerable. The home liaises extensively with local agencies in all areas of safeguarding. For example, the local police community support officer drops in once or twice a week, and the Registered Manager has regular meetings with the police officer responsible for missing persons.

Staff use a variety of incentives and rewards to encourage and promote positive behaviour. Sanctions are also frequently employed, the majority of these being the delaying of payment of pocket money. These sanctions are appropriate, although sometimes the evaluation of their effectiveness within the record shows that they have limited impact. Nevertheless, behaviour is generally settled. One young person said, 'I like it here as it keeps me out of trouble with the police. There are incentives to help me settle at night, this and other things the staff do will turn me into a better person. I am more independent and able to do things for myself.' All staff are trained in the use of physical restraint but it has been used only once since the last inspection.

The Registered Manager keeps a full record of vetting checks undertaken on staff. This enables him to be assured that all people employed at the home are suitable to work with children and young people.

Leadership and management

good

The one recommendation made at the previous inspection, relating to the induction of new staff, has been addressed. This means that all staff, even those on temporary contracts or who work part-time, are sufficiently prepared for the task. In addition, staff who enrolled on the required qualification have nearly completed it in a relatively short period of time. This demonstrates the commitment of the home to ensuring that staff have the necessary level of expertise to support young people effectively.

Two managers are registered to this home. One has been registered with Ofsted since April 2007 and is on a temporary full-time secondment to another post within the local authority. The other is managing the home full time and has been registered since August 2014. Both are suitably qualified and experienced.

External, independent monitoring of the home is thorough and identifies shortfalls as well as evaluating the home's strengths. Monitoring by the Registered Manager is detailed and addresses all required areas, taking account of the views of young people and social workers. There are good systems in place to track outcomes for young people, such as school attendance, on a monthly basis. This information is presented in a graphical format, making it easier for staff to understand where improvements are being made or where extra attention is needed to address progress. Although case records on young people are well organised, there is some missing or inaccurate information in care plans and other documents. This indicates that quality assurance of young people's records is not entirely robust.

Staff receive good quality professional supervision at regular intervals, in addition to annual performance appraisals. This support helps staff to reflect on their practice and build their own resilience in dealing with the sometimes considerable demands of the job. A comprehensive training programme for staff covers a wide spectrum of topics. There are regular refreshers of mandatory training such as behaviour management and safeguarding. Training is also available on issues which enable staff to gain a better understanding of the young people they look after, such as the impact of domestic violence on children. The skills and knowledge base of staff means that they are more effective in promoting the safety and welfare of young people.

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.