

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Graham Robinson
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Service information

Brief description of the service

A local authority operates this children's home. This service is registered for up to six young people of either gender, aged between 11 and 17 years of age. The home cares for young people with emotional and 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 **outstanding**.

The home is accommodating young people who are at different stages of their journey through the home. There is a recognition that the challenges and complexities of behaviour exhibited at times by young people, requires an individualised, supportive approach during times of challenge, stress, difficulty and uncertainty. Achieving positive outcomes takes time. However, young people are given that time in a home that has gained a reputation of not giving up on young people. This is achieved with high quality, consistent levels of care. As a result, based on their starting points, young people experience outstanding outcomes in all areas of their lives.

The home is structured with clear and consistent boundaries in place. Within that structure, young people's individual needs fuel and drive the organisation and working practices of the home. A stable, well-motivated staff group who are well organised and managed, provide young people with an environment where they can settle and reflect on their previous experiences. As a result, young people invest in a more ordered and socially acceptable lifestyle.

The strong relationships between staff and young people are based on trust and respect. Developing strong, trusting and respectful relationships is the foundation of the homes operation. Young people understand the boundaries in place, recognising them as fair and there to promote their best interests. They benefit from living in a stable, supportive and safe environment, where individuality is accepted in a non-judgemental way. Any challenging and unsafe behaviour is well managed by an experienced staff team that have the ability and commitment to initiate safe and

supportive working practices. This results in welfare being promoted positively.

The home has developed and maintains excellent working relationships with partner agencies which ensures young people receive appropriate multi-agency support to address their specific needs. Staff work proactively and supportively through troubled and challenging times, encouraging young people to improve their decision making as they grow and mature. As a result, young people develop greater awareness of themselves, improving their confidence and resilience as they journey towards greater independence.

An experienced manager is well supported by a staff team who are fully committed to the ethos, culture and working practices developed in the home. They provide a consistency of care that is recognised and appreciated by young people. The strengths and weaknesses of the home are recognised through the systematic monitoring and evaluation of practice. This results in suitable plans being put in place to move the home forward in its quest for continued development.

This inspection has not raised any major areas of concern, although one area for future development has been identified. This links to adding some detail to the guide for young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the young people's guide to the home includes the contact details for their Independent Reviewing Officer and the Children's Rights Director. (NMS 13.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people living at the home, are either achieving, or on their way to achieving, outstanding outcomes in all areas of their lives. This is based on their starting points and their current journey through the home. For example, young people say they settle well and develop trusting relationships with staff. As they progress, improved behaviour and general lifestyle changes allow them to move forward and make positive choices about themselves and their future. The ethos and working practices developed by the home support young people towards setting and achieving their own personal goals and these are reflected in the ambitions they have for the future.

The home gives young people who have usually experienced chaotic lifestyles prior to admission, a safe and secure base. This gives them stability and the opportunity to develop strong bonds and a sense of direction as they mature. As a result, they

make exceptional progress with their ability to form lasting relationships, attachments, develop resilience and in their understanding and appreciation of their own circumstances.

This is reflected in the views expressed by young people. One captured those feelings by saying; 'If I had not come here my life would be a complete mess and I don't know where I would have ended up.' General feedback from all young people spoken with was consistent in reflecting their positive views about the staff and all aspects of care given to them.

Contact arrangements can be complex and stressful and staff work flexibly to support and facilitate the arrangements in place. Young people and their social workers acknowledge this. All young people have appropriate arrangements in place which ensures their contact arrangements and needs are well met.

Overall, young people's educational outcomes, based on their starting points and taking account of personal issues and situations that have impacted negatively at times, are excellent. Staff work hard and are skilled at re-engaging young people with their education. They are well supported by local schools, colleges and other educational agencies who they have forged excellent links with. As a result, young people's educational needs are well supported, allowing for educational re-engagement and achievement to be maximised.

The physical and mental health needs of young people are being promoted positively. Day-to day health needs are being well met. Young people also benefit from having a staff group who are persistent in their search to secure appropriate specialist input. This is achieved through the development of excellent links into a variety of agencies that can supply specialist input when necessary. For example, in mental health, sexual health and alcohol related issues.

Young people take an active role in the daily operation of the home by shopping, planning menus and food preparation. Young people are encouraged to eat healthily with nutritious, balanced menus in place that cater for choice and individual taste. Young people are encouraged to try unfamiliar foods, appreciate different cultures and try international cuisine. Festivals and religious events are regularly celebrated.

Young people are encouraged to improve their lifestyles through diet and exercise. They are provided with information and given every encouragement and practical support to modify certain aspects of their lifestyle, such as tobacco, drugs and alcohol. The excellent working relationships established by the home with other services benefit young people in a variety of ways. For example, the home has developed strong links with independent counselling services. Collectively, this results in young people enjoying improvements to their general health and fitness levels.

The home is well established in the community, with young people given every encouragement to integrate into community life and make a positive contribution to the wider community. For example, some are active with children's rights councils and involved in voluntary work. These activities develop young people's social

awareness and help them to recognise there are others less well off than themselves.

The arrangements for guiding young people towards a more independent lifestyle are outstanding. Since the previous inspection the home has completely restructured its independence programme by developing and introducing a more formalised programme. All young people are actively engaged with their own individualised programme of independence. They speak positively about the programme, recognising the benefits in knowledge and practical skills being gained.

Quality of care

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

Young people are receiving an outstanding quality of care. The high levels of support given to them by staff, are recognised by young people and other professionals. For example, a number of young people likened staff to family members. One professional describes staff as being; 'committed to provide the highest level of care for the young people which has been evidenced on a regular basis.'

Staff have high aspirations for young people, whatever challenges and difficulties are presented. Excellent links with community and partner agencies allow for young people to participate fully in community life. Young people confirm they feel well supported, even in times of difficulty and stress. This helps to create meaningful and trusting relationships between young people and staff, which is a contributing factor to the homes success in minimising the number of serious behaviour management incidents that occur in the home.

Young people have access to information which promotes their rights and highlights how the complaints procedures can be accessed if necessary. For example, in the guide to the home for young people. However the guide lacks contact details for a young person's Independent Reviewing Officer and the Children's Rights Director. Young people confirm they understand how to make a complaint and are confident to do so, although none have been made since the previous inspection. Young people say they resolve issues through dialogue with staff, without the need to make a formal complaint.

The excellent relationships within the home allow for on-going communication, with young people confirming they are consulted regularly. They say they can influence certain aspects of the homes daily functioning, such as the choice of food, weekly activities and future leisure breaks. Young people identify meetings and key worker sessions as areas where consultation takes place. The practice of continuous consultation and acting upon it, gives young people a feeling of worth and a sense that their opinions and views do matter. It also gives them empowerment to control certain aspects of their own daily lives.

Young people and staff are relaxed with each other and actively enjoy each other's company. Young people are at the centre of the homes daily routines, which is run

for the benefit of them, not staff. This practice contributes significantly to the high quality of care provided being provided.

The range of high quality individualised planning documents and assessments of risk, link effectively with each other. When read collectively, they give an excellent insight into the needs of a young person, along with the plans and strategies in place to meet those needs. They are reviewed and updated regularly to keep them current. Young people confirm they are involved in their planning, which gives them a clear sense of direction and input regarding their own progress and future.

This home is modern, welcoming and homely. Young people are comfortable in their environment and there is a calm, relaxed atmosphere, which gives a good impression of the home and the people living in it. It is well kept, with good standards of repair, equipment, fixtures, furnishings and décor, although the bathroom areas are looking tired. However, a refurbishment plan has been drawn up and is due to be implemented later in the year. Young people have their own bedrooms, which are personalised to suit the tastes and interests of the occupant. Photographs and mementos on display reflect young people's positive experiences and celebrate success.

Young people are well integrated into the local community, with many enjoying active social lives. This allows them to form friendships with others in the community, helping them to become more integrated and accepted locally. They also engage in a wide range of shared activities with staff, as well as pursuing individual interests of their own. For example, young people happily shared their photograph albums which reflect the good time they experienced during the last summer holiday abroad. Young people and staff are currently planning their next summer holiday.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The overall arrangements to protect and safeguard young people are good. Excellent links to a range of partner agencies tasked with the role of keeping young people safe are well established. Fellow professionals report high levels of communication between the home and themselves. This enhances and promotes the collaborative and cohesive working practices that are in place. Staff are diligent and pro-active in reducing risk and demonstrate a full understanding of their role, responsibilities and duties to promote young people's welfare and keep them safe.

Due to their history and background, some young people can place themselves at risk through their own actions. However, staff are quick to address issues using the links established with external agencies. This has proved to be successful with any potential risk to young people being short lived. Young people make it clear they feel safe, secure and that the home is a safe place to be.

Young people confirm bullying is not an area of concern for them, acknowledging that staff intervene quickly if an incident occurs. This gives them a feeling of security

and general safety. Staff are vigilant to the dangers of bullying and the impact it could have. Good staffing levels reduce opportunities for bullying and help create an environment where any form of bullying is not tolerated.

The home has pro-active procedures in place to address incidents where young people go missing. This has been a problematic area, but collaborative working between staff and external agencies has reduced the number of incidents occurring. Local, multi-agency protocols are followed, which ensures staff respond appropriately to any incidents when they do occur. Incidents are monitored and evaluated which has been helpful in reducing incidents of late. The home has a good record of keeping young people safe.

Young people recognise that good behaviour is rewarded and say that rules and boundaries are fair. Staff work supportively rather than punitively with young people, even during times of unrest and challenge. The structure and boundaries in place are designed to protect young people, something they recognise and usually respect.

Staff are clear that physical intervention is used only as a last resort and this is reflected in practice, with few incidents having taken place since the previous inspection. Consistent and effective monitoring of all behaviour management incidents and issues, means young people's individual strategies are kept under review and adapted as required. This ensures that any serious behaviour management incidents that may occur, are safely managed.

There has been no staff recruitment for some years. However, appropriate recruitment policies and practice following the local authorities guidelines are in place. Longer serving staff are being re-checked over a three year cycle, ensuring that only suitably checked people have contact with young people.

Young people are protected through a range of risk assessments identifying hazards in and away from the home. They participate in regular fire drills and can safely exit the home if needed. Safety checks to maintain a safe environment are regularly undertaken. Individual risk assessments, coupled with coping strategies, promote a safe environment for all young people. Individual strategies are updated in light of reviews of young people's risks and progress.

Leadership and management

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

The organisation and management of the home is outstanding. An experienced, motivated and child centred manager is fully supported by a cohesive, well-motivated and experienced staff team who provide young people with a consistency of care. Difficulties and challenges are overcome using a team centred approach, where all staff work collectively to meet young people's needs and improve outcomes.

The formal staff supervision and appraisal programmes take place consistently, with

staff acknowledging the high level of support they receive. The manager has a strong commitment to professional development and staff training, with staff regularly attending training sessions which introduces them to new learning as well as revising set knowledge and basic skills.

The internal and external monitoring of the home takes place regularly and is of a high standard. Reports from both forms of monitoring evaluate, assess and quality assure all areas of the homes performance. Included in this process are the views of young people. This and other monitoring and evaluation activities conducted by the manager, feeds directly into the comprehensive written plans that are in place, which set realistic and challenging targets for the home.

The home has an excellent record of compliance. The two recommendations carried over from the previous inspection have both been fully addressed. This has resulted in improvements to ensure sanctions are clear and effective and in the improved ability of young people to develop greater financial capability. This has been enhanced with the introduction of the new formalised system introduced to promote young people's independence. This is one of a number of examples where the home has been able to demonstrate its capacity for continued improvement.

Young people are looked after by a dedicated and well-motivated team of staff who have a genuine desire and commitment to improve young people's outcomes and prepare them for the transition into adult life. Achieving positive outcomes can be slow and time consuming. However, there is an energy and balance to the home that allows young people to settle, explore issues and make mistakes in a safe environment. Staff are persistent in working positively with young people through times of challenge. This builds strong, trusting relationships, giving young people greater confidence and self-esteem. This is used as base to allow young people to grow, develop and mature at a pace that is right for them.

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.