

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

A local authority operates the children home and it is registered to care for up to six children and young people of both genders, from the age of 13 up to 17 years old.

The property is detached and located on a residential estate. Accommodation comprises of individual bedrooms for the young people, two comfortable lounges and a dining room. There is a patio and garden area to the rear of the building. Office space is separate.

The home's official function combines short-term care and assessment services as well as long-term permanency planning. Policies and the home's Statement of Purpose reflect this. At the time of the inspection, six young people were living at the home. It was possible to speak to four young people about the quality of care they receive.

The home is within easy travelling distance of community resources including parks, cinema, sports and athletics facilities. Bus routes connect the home with the local community and the national rail network. Shops and supermarkets are accessible within the surrounding community.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection was unannounced. This report comments on every outcome heading covering all the key children's homes national minimum standards. Progress against recommendations made during the last inspection are also evaluated.

The operation of this home is managed well under the leadership of a proposed Registered Manager. Staff practice provides a good standard of care and the support provided enables young people to achieve and develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Safeguarding support is coordinated on many levels and this ensures young people remain safe and happy. Relationships between staff and the young people are good and there is good cooperation especially in setting appropriate boundaries. There have been few behavioural management issues affecting the home's operation. The young people have chosen to lead stable lifestyles.

There is good emphasis on gaining important life skills. There are good links to pathway and aftercare planning. Staff liaise closely with social workers to plan young people's futures. Placement plans are suitably detailed and these are being implemented well. The promotion of young people's health and well-being is good.

The importance of gaining a good education is emphasised by staff and this has led to good attendance and some GCSE attainment.

The home's operation is monitored efficiently. Quality assurance systems show that the management team reflect on practice and this enables ongoing developments to be made. Staff receive good support and access to training and this improves their skills. There is a development plan outlining how standards will be maintained.

This report highlights some recommendations to support practice developments. The home's proposed manager is still to complete registration with Ofsted. There is no clear evidence base to show how staff personal development and appraisal is organised. A plan to drive forward practice in specific areas by introducing 'champions' is still to be implemented. The premises fire risk assessment has not been reviewed within the preceding twelve month period. The medicines cabinet contained household remedies that had not been agreed for use by health professionals.

Improvements since the last inspection

Recommendations made at the last inspection have been suitably addressed or are in the process of being addressed in the case of improving the clarity of information on staff personal development and appraisal.

The missing from home protocol is better supported by social workers who are carrying out more timely interviews when the young people return to the home. Staff have undertaken e-learning equality and diversity training and this new knowledge is better reflected within individuals placement arrangements. Reports completed following monthly regulation 33 visits provide better detail on the discussions that are taking place with young people and staff.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Health plans are detailed allowing health support to be coordinated well. Quality assurance systems monitor practice closely and this means that it remains safe. Good training is provided. Local chemists support all aspects of medicine management. Parental permissions for emergency treatment, and for administering medicines and first aid have been gained.

Policy and procedural guidance to support health and well-being is clear. These have been developed over many years through consultation with chemists and health professionals. There is a policy relating to non-prescription medication and the use of household remedies. The contents of the medicines cabinet does not fully mirror the household remedies that have been agreed for use following consultation with health professionals.

The management team ensure that full health histories are gained as part of the

referral and introduction procedures. Any issues identified within referral documents are promptly discussed with General Practitioners. This means that young people's health is promoted from the start of their placement. This remains a key priority throughout the time young people live at the home.

The young people confirm satisfaction with how health and well-being are being handled. They confirm that they are familiar with their health arrangements and are fully aware of the contents of their health plans. Young people are allowed to administer their own medication if sufficiently responsible to do so. Risk assessments are produced to support practice. A minor filing error with one particular assessment was discussed. The key worker role is also well developed to deliver health promotion work covering matters such as sexual relationships, smoking cessation, drug misuse and healthy living. Staff work closely with the young people supporting their health needs. Some health screening work had been undertaken.

Routine medical, optical and dental appointments are organised by key workers. Good relationships are established with a looked after children nurse. This allows statutory medical examinations to be organised. Staff reassure young people if they have concerns about treatments. There is some ongoing work to support a phobia on dentistry treatment. The key workers support the young people to lead safe and healthier lives. Specialist advice and help is organised to support mental health when required. Relationships are established with the local youth offending team. The staff at the home are good at encouraging the young people to engage with supportive services.

Catering arrangements are managed well. The home has a full time cook whose hours are managed sensibly. Nutritionally balanced food is prepared when the young people require it. Menus are planned with the young people. Some project work to freshen up menus is taking place. Minimum staff input is needed relating to healthy eating. Being healthy through good diet and exercise is recognised by all the young people. They work closely alongside staff in preparing meals at the weekend. Many have developed skills through independence training. Culturally themed meals are encouraged by staff and birthdays and special occasions are celebrated.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The young people present at this inspection are happy and settled. Individual personalities have been enabled to prosper due to effective staff support. No concern relating to bullying or safeguarding children procedures is evident. The young people have an appreciation of and respect for their peers. They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they contribute to community life. The peer group dynamic remains manageable on most occasions meaning that the majority of experiences being gained are positive.

The young people living at the home commented that they felt safe. Accurate records are maintained showing the home is managed well, providing suitable

physical safety and security for each individual. Staff have received suitable training in order that they can respond appropriately to allegations or suspicions of abuse. Policy and procedural guidance has been established at this home that is consistent with local safeguarding team protocols. Suitable safeguarding and complaints information is provided for the young people within a children's guide. They are aware of the contents of their information and they acknowledge that people suffer no recrimination if complaints and grumbles are made.

The staff are competent and receive access to training to support the roles they provide. Staff with key worker responsibilities uphold children's rights as well as providing daily support to achieve and develop. Respectful communication is the norm at the home. A good atmosphere was maintained throughout the visit. Young people respond very well to praise. There is effective use of positive reinforcement opposed to the use of sanctions. Support being provided ensures that the young people can make choices about how to lead safe lives. No concerns have been highlighted relating to physical intervention. As part of the home's agreed safeguarding procedures the young people reflect on incidents that they are involved in.

The reporting systems and actions taken in the past in response to significant incidents have been appropriate. Transparent reporting allows staff practice to be monitored and this means young people remain safe. There is a well established missing from home protocol. There has been a good degree of success in reducing the number of times that young people go missing without permission. Further reductions can be made. Young people are legitimately allowed to stay out overnight with their friends. A sensible decision making framework operates alongside official government guidance on this matter. Effective monitoring during monthly visits to the home by external managers prompted a quicker response time from field social workers to undertake back to home interviews.

Health and safety at the home is managed well. Certification is held centrally and this shows regular servicing of gas and electrical installations. Portable appliance testing, fire extinguisher servicing and checks on emergency lighting are routinely undertaken. A fire risk assessment of the premises is available. This had not been reviewed within the past 12-month period. The recording of fire drills is clear. A tour of the accommodation revealed no hazards to young people's safety. A range of risk assessments have been produced to support practice.

A random selection of personnel files were viewed. Information held in-house confirmed that no staff had started work prior to being in receipt of an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. A suitable checking system is evident throughout the recruitment process. Written evidence to show a suitable decision making process is being followed when employing staff with cautions or convictions was presented. Vetting of visitors to the home is undertaken with identity checks being carried out before access is permitted.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff practice engages the young people in a range of activities to develop skills and individual potential. Staff are quick to identify individual interests and have been successful in supporting young people's aspirations. Recreation is clearly linked to developing healthy lifestyles. Good resources are available at the home. The home has its own vehicle. There is a suitable budget provided that enables young people to pursue their hobbies and interests in the community.

Individual needs are outlined within a range of plans including placement plans, risk assessments and health plans. Good records are maintained on the work being undertaken. The knowledge that staff have enables a timely individual response to be taken when young people are most in need. Support being provided is coordinated within a multidisciplinary framework, ensuring children and young people make progress and achieve goals. The young people have developed an understanding and appreciation of their personal circumstances and they are working with staff in planning for their futures.

Developing educational potential forms a clear part of the home's philosophy of care. Educational opportunities are being tailored to meet individual needs and there has been access to mainstream, special school placements and college courses. Staff emphasise the importance of gaining a good education and encourage attendance. Young people's successes are celebrated. Efforts continue to be made to support educational attainment after some courses had recently ended or broken down. There is some consideration to introduce virtual education arrangements for some individuals. Some of the young people are looking into alternative college arrangements with the help of key workers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Practice at this home embraces the Every Child Matters agenda designed to improve children's services. Records provide a permanent overview of the work that takes place. Plans highlight the response being taken to equality and diversity matters including religion, cultural identity and heritage. Information provides an account of an individual's progress and successes as well as the occasional disappointment. The young people provided positive comments on their experiences at the home.

Referral procedures are managed well. Impact assessments have been used for a long time at this home and these ensure the group dynamic remains manageable. All the young people are treated fairly, with practice capable of supporting individuals living there. Risk assessments also support planning. The ability of staff to maintain strong supportive relationships with young people ensures placement stability.

Reviews occur at the correct frequency allowing placement plans to be monitored.

Reports are prepared for each review. Placement planning is effective. Contact arrangements are established for each young person. Staff have a good understanding of family histories. There is effective liaison with social workers, parents and carers to finalise leave and contact arrangements. The reasons why some contact has to be supervised is known and clearly recorded. A suitable and sensible checking process has been carried out to allow young people to stay overnight with friends.

Good communication between staff, young people and their parents, social workers and other professionals is evident. Young people are fully consulted with and fully involved in life at the home. They make a clear contribution to the development of services at this home. Staff are committed to developing the standard of care by continuing to seek views. Views, expressed opinions and feedback are welcomed at this home.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The management team is familiar with the formal response required for pathway and aftercare planning. Plans are developed through statutory review procedures. Assessments include input from young people, staff and social workers. This approach ensures decisions are agreed and areas of responsibility are known from the start. The age and stage of young people's placements meant that formal pathway planning was required for four young people. Assessments had been completed and plans produced for three. Ongoing discussions are taking place to finalise a plan for the other young person.

Pathway plans run in conjunction with other plans and clearly set out placement needs. Placement experiences provided at the home allow young people to gain life skills that will support them into adulthood. The quality of experience provided in-house means young people do gain competencies that will support them into adulthood and prepare them for the world of work. Access to college placements remains integral to planning.

The home is safe, being decorated and furnished to a good standard. There is good space and resources to meet the needs of the young people. The design and layout of the home manages to retain a homely and comfortable feel. The use of the space and the different rooms is well thought out. The young people value their surroundings and this means that there is minimum damage to the fabric of the building. There is a maintenance person to coordinate repairs. Each young person has their own bedroom. These areas are suitably personalised. Bathrooms and toilets comply with national minimum standards for children's homes. Ancillary staff work hard and established routines are suitable to ensure the accommodation remains clean and tidy.

Relationships and appropriate links with neighbours and the surrounding community are being maintained. Young people frequently utilise community resources. Staff

provide advice to young people on how to stay safe when they are out in the community. Relations with local community police are established.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The local authority responsible for this home appointed a new manager between inspections. An application to be registered with Ofsted is still to be finalised. The proposed Registered Manager is experienced and holds relevant qualifications. The management team at the home continue to reflect on services being provided and this leads to ongoing improvements. Some specific areas of work had been targeted for future development. 'Champions' are to be appointed from within the staff team to develop practice links with equality and diversity matters; education; employment; health and well-being.

The home remained stable between inspections. Efficient management of young people's needs has led to stable lifestyles being experienced. The staff and management team deliver a good standard of care. Practice meets with the requirements of children's homes national minimum standards and associated regulations. The staff team understand and have the skills to support the needs of the young people. Staff are well motivated.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is policy and guidance. Ongoing training is being provided. Fairness is reflected within the staff team's practice to ensure positive experiences continue to be gained. Good practice examples include a well managed incentive scheme and opportunities for the young people to stay overnight with their friends once reasonable checks had been undertaken. Staff are good at listening to young people and allow each individual opportunities to voice their views, opinions and concerns. Transparent communication with young people and social workers demonstrates a real commitment to further improving equality and diversity in practice. Equality and diversity is established within the culture and ethos of the home.

Checks are in place to monitor the home's operation. Monthly reports are being produced by managers external to the home. Reports coming through to Ofsted include objective comments as well as detail on discussions that take place with young people and staff during these visits. Action is taken where shortfalls are identified. The home's management team have a team plan outlining how the home's operation will be maintained. There is ongoing monitoring of the home's records by the management team. A new recording format had recently been introduced to support the home's performance monitoring framework. This format encourages self evaluation of team plans and targets outlined under the Every Child Matters framework.

Records at this home show satisfactory clarity in how staff are being managed. Induction and foundation training is provided. Good training attendance records are maintained. Staff confirm that supervision is taking place. There is access to National

Vocational Qualification training at Level 3 and 4 and the Registered Managers Award. These are recognised qualifications to work in and manage a children's residential setting. A high percentage of staff hold relevant qualifications. Ongoing training is provided to continually improve staff skills. The records on staff personal development and appraisal are not clear.

Good leadership is provided. The staff team demonstrate many competencies. There is a good pool of casual staff available. Deployment of staff is good. The staffing structure experienced one change between inspections. Continuity with staff practice is not affected. Rotas demonstrate that staffing levels are being maintained. Staff are clear about their roles, balancing their work so that the individual and collective needs of the young people are met whilst ensuring that the necessary administrative tasks are undertaken.

Staff have good written guidance, policies and procedures to support their practice. The home's Statement of Purpose provides information in accordance with regulations. Aims and objectives, as well as the philosophy of care are outlined. Staff use guidance to ensure a consistent response to meeting young people's presenting needs. Pre-inspection information submitted to Ofsted prior to this inspection was detailed and included an accurate self assessment.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the household medicines policy is followed and the contents of the medicines cabinet contains only medicines that have been agreed (NMS 13.11)
- review and update the premises fire risk assessment (NMS 26.8)
- complete the registration of the new manager with Ofsted (NMS 34.3)
- ensure management systems used to support staff personal development and appraisal are fully implemented (NMS 28.7)
- ensure the duties and the line of accountability of staff with delegated responsibilities, specifically champions for developing practice linked to equality and diversity, education and health are made clear. (NMS 28.6)