

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stephen Trainor
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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**.

All the young people receive a high standard of care and this means they commit to their placements, work hard, and over time learn how to take full responsibility for their behaviour. Individuals are very clear about their placement arrangements, show excellent commitment, and provide their best cooperation allowing each of them to make excellent progress, both socially and educationally. Young people continuously achieve and develop from the consistent support and approaches they receive from a highly experienced staff team. Keyworker systems are particularly effective. Young people build their self-knowledge, self-awareness and emotional resilience to the challenges they face throughout the time that they live at the home. Young people improve their decision making skills and this clearly contributes to keeping them safe.

Relationships between young people and between staff and young people are excellent and each young person shows that they value difference. All the young people state that they feel safe while living at the home. There is excellent safeguarding afforded to residents from clear and agreed strategies, protocols risk assessments and placement plans that staff implement. Some young people have not always made the right decision choosing to go missing from the home and exposing themselves to different risks. These episodes are lessening and better 'lifestyle' choices are being made by the young people. Many extremely positive comments were received from a wide range of professionals and agencies supporting placements and these unanimously agreed that a high quality of care was being provided and this was keeping young people safe.

Young people's efforts are rewarded and clear incentives help to change behaviours.

Young people are cared for by an experienced, competent, and highly motivated team of staff. Staff are fully up-to-date with professional and legal developments following extensive changes to inspection frameworks. The promotion of young people's health and well-being is excellent. Recreational interests are supported very well. All the young people's education programmes are well thought out, all are working very well, there is excellent attendance and attainment at respective schools. Young people have embraced their learning and development opportunities.

Young people gain important life skills from the start of their placement and develop self-knowledge, self-help skills and improve their self-esteem for the time they leave the home. Young people are in a position to fulfil their potential from their engagement in well-focused high quality placement plans. Young people develop excellent interpersonal skills and have tremendous confidence to succeed as they prepare for their next placement. The home's management team have been instrumental in piloting new ways of working with adult services and support agencies.

The young people are extremely relaxed within their home. The home's environment is very supportive and underpinned by defined boundaries. There are few behaviour management problems. Young people's views are consistently gathered and these influence the home's operation and future direction. Young people are involved in decision making that impacts on all aspects of their lives.

The home's aims and objectives are clearly being fulfilled. The views of partners are being gathered and these are used to shape future services. Regulation 33 and 34 monitoring reports are comprehensive and provide an in-depth analysis of information and evaluation that clearly demonstrates the home's management have the capacity to plan continuous improvements. This service has a massive impact on the lives of each young person and improves their future prospects.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the care and support provided further reduces the number of times young people go missing without permission; in particular, strategies support young people to consistently make the right decisions and show that they understand the dangers and risks of leaving the home without permission (NMS 5.1)
- ensure the outcome of any action taken or investigation following a notifiable event is captured within the home's written records and ensure the outcome is communicated to Ofsted (NMS 24.2)
- ensure maintenance procedures are suitable to maintain a comfortable and homely environment; specifically, ensure residential staff are not spending

unreasonable amounts of time decorating and cleaning due to the changes to the staffing structure. (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Young people experience stable placements and make significant progress in many areas, including their social presentation, self-awareness and taking responsibility for their behaviour. As a result young people develop and mature. The young people are extremely confident in their placements. Residents commented, 'The staff are always caring and supporting and understand and always find time to help me with my issues.' Young people collectively state that the experience of living at the home, 'Changes lives'. Significant progress is being made by all residents and they are able to make responsible and mature decisions.

High quality assessment and planning takes place resulting in individuals very specific needs being met. Young people have a clear understanding of their plans and arrangements. They extend their full cooperation resulting in them being in a very good position to fulfil their potential. Staff work extremely well in partnership with many different professionals and agencies implementing plans effectively. Achievements are remarkable considering the starting points of some of the young people. The excellent ethos and culture established clearly fulfils the service aims and objectives and allows young people to build a great deal of resilience against the many challenges they face as they work towards securing a brighter future.

Plans are high quality and individual targets are being met. Young people are extremely settled and extend their full cooperation on most occasions. Young people achieve personal goals and this helps them to develop a better understanding and appreciation of their personal circumstances. It is clear that young people can motivate themselves, especially to attend meetings, where they express their views with some confidence. The young people are all very optimistic about their futures. All have clear aspirations and believe that they have secured a better future from the time they have spent at the home.

Young people living at the home are treated fairly and staff practice is capable of supporting their individual needs. Staff have the skills, motivation and abilities to form very positive working relationships with young people and sustain them. Young people gain tremendous benefits from the high levels of emotional support they receive. This is particularly evident in maintaining relationships with family and friends and reducing risk-taking behaviours. Young people have learnt how to keep themselves safe.

Young people are enthusiastic about their education and college placements. All work hard to complete their secondary school education, complete GCSE examinations and securing meaningful future employment. This is a tremendous achievement considering many of them have had limited or disjointed education experiences in the past. Young people's willingness to participate has resulted in very high

attendance and attainment. Each young person has grown in confidence through their wide range of learning experiences.

Young people enjoy good health and select to follow a healthy lifestyle. There are very close working relationships with Children Looked After Nurses and this allows support to be targeted to the times young people are most in need. Nurses confirm plans are implemented effectively. Young people understand key health risks associated with risk taking behaviours such as smoking, drug and alcohol use as well as sexual health risks. All young people are familiar with their health arrangements, are aware of the contents of their health plans and attend their appointments with health professionals. Young people provide full cooperation with regard to mental health services. They take responsibility for their health and make clear links between diet and exercise. Regular activities ensure they remain physically active.

Young people gain many competencies and life skills through good quality experiences provided by in-house independence and social skills training programmes. They build social resilience and life skills straight from the start of their placements. Young people have particular interests in food preparation and they are adept around the kitchen. Programmes encourage good social presentation skills which are clearly identifiable in how young people conduct themselves at the home and in the surrounding community. Programmes prepare young people for the wider world of work. The home's management are instrumental in supporting and managing change through pathway and transition planning. On-going pilot work with adult services continues to improve the transition process experienced by the young people. All are very well prepared and fully aware of options open to them as they move to their next placement and adult life.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy excellent relationships with staff which enable them to engage positively and make good choices, for example, keeping themselves safe and getting the best from their placement. Staff are skilled and show great insight and understanding of young people's needs. As a result, young people appreciate and value the efforts of staff and work closely with them to plan their futures. Comments made by young people included, 'I think the home is the best I have been in;' 'We are safe in this home and we respect the rules.'

Young people are confident to express their views in their statutory reviews and there is also representation on a local children's care council. Staff practice supports young people to maximise their contributions. Individual plans are of a high quality, reflecting young people's needs and charting their progress. Social workers receive frequent progress updates. All achievements are celebrated and this continuously builds young people's self-esteem. Records of achievement are proudly displayed by the young people. All partners confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the quality and approach taken by staff. One social worker commented, 'There is excellent communication, the unit keep other professionals informed and work in partnership

with other agencies.'

Impact risk assessments have been used successfully to maintain a compatible peer group dynamic. Young people make big improvements in their behaviour and all are relaxed, happy and confident in their placements. Independent Reviewing Officer comments show that young people fully engage with their arrangements. Equality and diversity are well established within the culture and ethos of the home and this means there are many opportunities to develop self-knowledge and self-help skills. There is excellent work being coordinated through participation and involvement plans.

Partnership arrangements are extremely effective, and communication between staff, young people and their parents, social workers and other professionals is highly effective. The overall response being taken to support young people's needs is excellent. Consistent practice eliminates any potential confusion with the arrangements in place for each young person.

Each young person's educational potential is supported by proactive staff practice. Developing educational potential forms a clear part of the home's philosophy of care. Care staff continuously emphasise the importance of young people gaining the best education. Each young person has a comprehensive education plan that works in practice providing continuous learning and development opportunities. Young people show that they are fully committed to their education and have impressive attendance records. There has been great deal of success in maintaining existing school and college placements as well as utilising virtual schools. Learning methods ensure young people develop key skills suited for adult life and the world of work.

Young people understand how to make a complaint. They confirm that complaints, if made, would be responded to in full. A written guide covers complaints, with information, guidance and contact details of agencies such as Ofsted, children's rights and the Children's Rights Director. Young people can differentiate between grumbles and serious complaints. Young people have skills to sort out minor matters positively between themselves. This includes discussion or by raising matters during in-house meetings.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted. The key worker role is well developed to deliver health promotion work. Medication is stored safely, and records are maintained on the administration of medication, including prescribed and non-prescription medication. There are clear policies and procedural guidance and these are followed in practice. All staff receive suitable training to support health and well-being and this maintains the high quality of care being provided. There are excellent collaborative links with many different health professionals and agencies.

Staff engage young people in a range of activities to develop individual potential and enhance learning opportunities. Young people's aspirations are supported and a suitable budget enables them to pursue their hobbies and interests. A good balance between organised activities and young people's free time supports their future independence. A significant life experience was presented to all six members of the

peer group during the summer. Behaviours allowed a foreign holiday to be planned. Young people commented, 'The holiday to France was amazing, I had a fantastic time.' Rewards and incentive schemes work extremely well at this home in changing behaviours.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people confirm that they are safe living at the home. They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they contribute to the home's operation. Young people develop skills that enable them to differentiate their behaviour according to the different settings and situations they find themselves in. Well coordinated safeguarding work is suitable to support children in making choices on how to lead their lives. This means all young people learn how to lead safe and fulfilling lives.

Young people's personalities prosper at this home. One young person commented, 'Staff have helped me to calm down at times. I have learnt to talk about my issues better.' Another young person commented, 'I feel safe and cared for, staff are helpful at all times.' All young people confirmed that staff listen to them.

Young people say that bullying is not an issue of concern to them and confirm that staff do not tolerate any form of bullying. They have confidence that staff will respond to any bullying that may occur. There is very good interaction and sensible discussion around difference, allowing members of the peer group to maintain a positive self-view. All young people understand the many forms that bullying can take and are equally clear about what to do if they have any concerns. A social worker commenting, 'I cannot identify any areas which need improvement. The home are committed to safeguarding the young people placed there.'

Young people have suitable safeguarding and complaints information. Young people are aware of the content of this information and acknowledge that they will not suffer any recrimination if complaints and grumbles are made. Policy and procedural guidance is consistent with that of the local safeguarding team's protocols. Good relationships are established with the safeguarding Local Area Designated Officer. Staff receive regular training to update their knowledge and have a good understanding of safeguarding policies, procedures and actions they should take when an incident arises and this allows young people to live in a safe and friendly environment.

Systems for dealing with young people who go missing from home are well established and a protocol is set out. Comprehensive risk assessments take account of a young person's potential to go missing. Risk assessments are agreed by all professionals supporting the young people. A relatively high number of incidents had been reported between inspections. Not all the strategies being adopted had been successful in reducing the number of times young people go missing without permission. Alternative strategies are constantly being tried. A social worker

commenting on safeguarding practice stated, 'Given that my service users are teenagers there is a balance to be struck in being too restrictive and allowing young people a degree of independence. I feel that the home gets the balance right.' There are no major concerns relating to how the home manages the young people's behaviour. Standard practice is to provide young people with the opportunity to reflect on incidents they are involved in. A decrease in reports is noted over recent months as young people take more responsibility for their behaviour. The home's management team work hard with partners to lessen the influence and impact that dysfunctional family units can have on young people's choices.

Staff uphold children's rights. Young people respond very well to praise and there is good use of positive reinforcement opposed to the use of sanctions. Young people usually decide their own sanction for any minor misdemeanours. Respectful communication and an excellent atmosphere were maintained throughout the inspection. Staff are clear that physical intervention is very much a last resort. Records were presented on the incidents between inspections. All staff receive regular and refresher training in positive handling techniques.

Young people benefit from a permanent, experienced and stable staff team. No changes had been made to the staffing structure between inspections. Recruitment practice is robust, ensuring only suitable people work with young people. Equally good practice ensures the vetting of visitors to safeguard young people. No concerns were identified with the home's recruitment procedures.

Health and safety are managed well, ensuring young people and staff remain safe. Regular servicing of equipment and routine safety checks maintain a safe environment. Young people know what to do in the case of an emergency and can exit the home safely. Staff implement a range of risk assessments to identify and minimise hazards. There is a comprehensive audit of health and safety matters carried out on an annual basis.

Leadership and management

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

Young people develop meaningful and lasting attachments from the supportive management culture and the hard work of the staff. Young people are gaining tremendous benefits from placement experiences being provided by a competent staff team. It is a strong, child-focused service that is conducive to young people developing and maximising their potential. Clear partnership arrangements underpins all practice and there is tremendous satisfaction with the high quality services provided. Staff are responsive to the specific needs and specific circumstances affecting both young people and their families.

This service is managed by a highly experienced and fully qualified manager. Partners confirm communication is highly effective. Permanent records are produced to show how children's developmental needs are being met. Targets set for the young people are achieved. On-going evaluation of placement plans takes place and

information gained secures further developments. Staff morale is excellent, energy levels high, and enthusiasm for providing the best quality care leads to many new initiatives being introduced.

There is a clear vision for how the home should operate. Practice adjustments have been made in line with a new inspection framework, new evaluation schedule, and new national minimum standards. Staff fully comprehend these changes and importantly are able to talk about the impact change has had on their practice. Further enhancements have been made to the outstanding practice that was demonstrated at the last full inspection.

There is extensive consultation with partners. All levels of staff influence and shape the service with their ideas and initiatives. Practice is developed by a management team that is perceptive in identifying the home's strengths and the areas where it could perform better. A comprehensive written and verbal self-assessment of the service was provided by the Registered Manager. The home's service history shows the assessment to be accurate.

The views of the young people and staff are fully captured during visits made to the home under the requirements of Regulations 33 and 34. Report formats better capture comments and observations. The home's management team continually reflect on their practice and the home's operation. A range of evaluative documents in line with new framework, grade descriptors and evaluation schedule was provided. Reports produced make sense of the available data and help to plan future services and ensure continuous improvements. Some realistic and challenging targets are outlined within the home's development plan. Evaluation of this plan occurs and this also contributes to controlling the home's activities. Due to a change in the staffing structure ancillary and maintenance staff are no longer employed at the home. Some new procedures are being introduced to ensure residential staff do not spend unreasonable amounts of time decorating and cleaning.

Young people's individual needs, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are being met. The young people have full confidence in the staff and know who is responsible for them at all times of the day and night. Staffing levels are maintained and a good gender balance is evident within the team. Shift patterns ensure excellent continuity with routines and procedures. The staff team is consistently supportive, attentive and sensitive to the care they provide for young people. Staff acting as 'children's champions' drive forward improvements continuously.

Records at this home show good clarity in how staff are managed. Detailed induction and foundation training are provided. Staff confirm that supervision is taking place. All permanent staff have relevant qualifications. Systems for staff personal development and appraisal are well established and this helps staff to further enhance their skills sets. Challenging objectives are being set for staff as part of the management response when valuing individual performance.

Young people's placements are stable and the home's service history shows an

excellent record in compliance. Few recommendations were set at the last two inspections. Those that were set had been comprehensively addressed leading to further improvements in the procedures operated for internal and external monitoring; on-going training with regard to the new inspection framework is also being provided. There is an effective system in place to notify persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events. Only one report was forwarded to Ofsted over the past 12-month period. The outcome of this event was not clearly recorded leading to a slight delay in communications to Ofsted. There have been no concerns or complaints about the home between inspections.

Staff practice is supported by comprehensive written guidance, policies and procedures. These documents are also accessible through the responsible authority intranet. Information is written in plain English. The home's Statement of Purpose provides information in accordance with regulations. The ethos and working practices of the home clearly meet aims and objectives and this means young people acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures as they undertake their journey into adulthood. The home's management team is proactive with their requests if minutes of meetings are delayed and this ensures placement plans and risk assessments remain fully up to date.

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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.