

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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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, both genders, from the age of 13 years 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 purpose is changing from the present short-term care services to more long-term permanency planning. Ofsted is processing a variation for these changes. At the time of the inspection, six young people were on the register. It was possible to speak to three young people about the quality of care they receive and two of them completed surveys.

The young people can gain access to many community resources including parks, cinema and sports and athletics facilities. Bus routes connect the home with the local community and the national rail link. Shops and supermarkets are accessible within the surrounding community.

Summary

This inspection was unannounced. This report comments on every outcome heading covering all the key Children's Homes National Minimum Standards (NMS). Recommendations made during the last inspection were evaluated.

This is a good children's home in every respect. The recent service history shows that the home's management and operation is coordinated safely and the support provided enables residents to achieve and develop their potential. A home's development plan has successfully been implemented. The quality of practice enables young people to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. Young people's needs are consistently being met by a competent team of staff.

Residents are settled and on the vast majority of occasions are providing their full cooperation. They remain focused in their placements and gain valuable skills that will be needed when they move on from the home. There is a clear focus on residents' futures. Independence training, pathway and after care planning is being coordinated well. College placements have been secured for those that have completed their secondary school education.

Quality assurance systems show that the management team are reflecting on practice. This enables the service to be developed in line with inspection report recommendations as well as introducing new initiatives. Communication between the home's management and Ofsted is good. Staff practice embraces equality and diversity principles throughout the range of services being provided. Good health support is provided.

The registered manager is managing a service that allows young people to experience safe and stable lifestyles. Recent service history shows few behavioural management problems, no major safeguarding concerns, no major complaints and a small number of reportable incidents. Consultation and communication between staff and the young people is good. Respectful relationships have been established.

This report highlights some recommendations to support practice developments. The evidence base to show how staff personal development and appraisal is organised is not clear. Dates for equality and diversity training and complaints training are not known. Staff have not yet attended top-up safeguarding training. This delivers a wider agenda into how young people can be kept safe.

The home's registered manager is still to complete a relevant management qualification. Permission for using first aid and appropriate non-prescription medicines are not obtained for each resident. A pathway plan was not fully established for another resident.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Actions and recommendations made at the last inspection have been suitably addressed or are in the process of being addressed such as in the case of ensuring written permission was gained from a person with parental responsibility for each young person, for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication.

A variation has been submitted to Ofsted and this will see a change to the home's purpose and function. The home's aims are clear and these are being applied in practice. Notifications of significant events are being conveyed to Ofsted. New recording systems for sanctions and restraint have been introduced. The home's records show that young people are commenting on incidents and events.

There are improved recordings on fire drills and good certification on tests carried out on safety equipment. Public and employee liability insurance arrangements are clearly displayed. Risk assessments are clearer on times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying is greatest. The young people's payphone is being managed in order that it affords acceptable levels of privacy. The likely effects of admissions upon the existing group of residents are given suitable consideration. Impact assessments are being used to ensure the group dynamic remains compatible.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The young people living at the home are settled. Staff have provided good health and wellbeing support between inspections and this has promoted resident's self-confidence and social presentation. All the young people are fit and healthy. Health plans are up to date, allowing health support to continue to be coordinated. The management team ensure that full health histories are gained as part of the referral and introduction procedures. Parental permissions for emergency and operative treatment are gained. Permission for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication is not yet on each resident's file.

Annual statutory medicals are being organised. The promotion of the young people's health and well-being is a key priority throughout the time they live at the home. The young people's welfare is closely monitored and their health needs are well met. Routine doctor, optical and dental appointments are being organised. Young people confirm that they are aware of their health arrangements.

The key worker system coordinates support efficiently and this includes health promotion work covering matters such as sexual relationships, smoking cessation, drug and alcohol misuse and healthy living. Many of these areas are also covered within education programmes and there are regular visits to outside agencies and professionals whom provide good advice and guidance. The young people develop skills, gain knowledge and have choices on how to lead safe and healthier lives. There is access to specialist services to support mental health and wellbeing when required.

Policy and procedural guidance to support health and well-being is available. Practice and recording on the administration and storage of medication is clear. Safe storage was evident throughout the inspection. Staff are aware of residents' health needs and showed that they are competent to provide services to meet needs. They are clear on the procedures for administering prescription and non-prescription medicines. Recordings formats are established and this allows a clear audit trail on medicines administered. Staff receive training to ensure that they have the skills to provide first aid and safe handling and administration of medicines.

Catering arrangements are managed well. The home has a full time cook whose hours are managed sensibly. This means that nutritionally balanced food can be prepared when the young people require them the most. The kitchen and dining resources are to a high standard and this helps to facilitate enjoyable mealtime experiences. Environmental Health inspections raise no concerns. Menus are planned with the young people and these show that there is plenty of choice. Residents recognise the links between good diet and exercise to remain healthy. They can work alongside staff in preparing meals and many have developed skills through independence training to enable them to prepare their own meals. Independence training is a key focus of all placements. A range of plans, including pathway and after care arrangements, support individual growth and the acquisition of skills. Young people have developed an understanding and appreciation of different cultures through themed meals and the celebration of cultural and religious festivals.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The staff and management team provide good continuity with all the services provided. Operational systems are being implemented well. The arrangements for complaints, safeguarding children, bullying and behaviour management ensure that young people feel listened to and protected. This home provides suitable physical safety and security for the young people resident. Young people are learning how to differentiate their behaviour according to the different settings and situations they find themselves in. This means that they can choose how to lead stable lifestyles. Interactions throughout the course of the inspection showed there is mutual respect and trust between the young people and staff.

Reporting systems and actions taken in response to significant incidents have been appropriate. Incidents including those involving safeguarding issues had been reported in a timely manner. A clear record was produced on the actions taken. The home's management team continue to work with other departments to allow investigations to be completed. There is good internal scrutiny of records and practice enabling a prompt response to anything identified. The Ofsted protocol for reporting significant incidents is known and followed and this helps to establish accurate records.

Safeguarding policy and procedural guidance is established. There is liaison with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) to ensure practice remains consistent with local protocols. The home has a nominated officer. Staff have received some training in order that they can respond appropriately to allegations or suspicions of abuse. Training in the wider safeguarding agenda has not yet been provided. Staff do emphasise the need to report accurately and transparently when incidents occur. Suitable safeguarding and complaints information is provided for the young people within a guide. Staff uphold children's rights by coordinated support on a daily basis and this ensured young people had no concerns relating to bullying.

There is effective use of positive reinforcement opposed to the use of sanctions. Sanctions, when used, are fair. Incidents requiring physical intervention have been reduced between inspections. All permanent staff are trained in selected methods and techniques. There is access to refresher training. Bound records of sanctions and restraints provide all the necessary information when incidents occur. Behaviour management plans and risk assessments support staff practice and these have been used successfully to change some aspects of the young people's behaviour. The young people are confident and comfortable interacting with staff and visitors.

Reporting protocols are firmly established for the times that young people go missing from the home without permission. There is effective use of risk assessments and specific responses are agreed in line with residents' vulnerability. Relationships are established with police. Practice has recently been developed to include on line reporting of incidents of absconding with the police.

An automatic response is being taken to accommodation health and safety and relevant certification is held to show servicing and maintenance is taking place on fire, gas and electrical installations and appliances. There is a premises fire risk assessment and regular fire drills are being carried out. Practise drills cover the 24-hour clock. No hazards to the residents' safety were observed. Suitable public and employee liability insurance is displayed.

A random selection of personnel files were reviewed. Information held in-house confirmed that no staff had started work prior to being in receipt of an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. A suitable checking system is evident throughout the recruitment process. Some minor gaps in the available information was highlighted to management staff. An assistant manager had already been tasked with reviewing the personal files and establish full and satisfactory information. 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.

Developing educational potential forms a clear part of the home's philosophy of care. Each resident has a clearly laid out personal education plan. Educational opportunities are tailored to meet individuals needs. Suitable arrangements are in place for all the young people. School attendance was reported to have been good prior to the summer holidays. Staff are proactively supporting the young people for their return back to their respective school or college placement in September. College placements have been accessed for those young people who have recently completed their compulsory education. These should provide improved life opportunities and better prospects for the world of work. The results of GCSE examinations were eagerly awaited.

Staff celebrate residents achievements. There is safe access to the internet to support residents studies.

Staff practice remains responsive for the times young people are most in need. A coordinated response is being taken in meeting the needs of the young people living at the home. Support being provided is coordinated within a multidisciplinary framework, ensuring young people continually make progress. All work undertaken is subject to regular review. Specialist services are accessed when needed. A good quality of care is being provided ensuring young people achieve and develop their potential.

Individuals needs are clearly outlined within a range of plans including detailed placement plans, risk assessments and health plans. Increasing residents awareness of equality and diversity issues forms part of the ongoing work programmes. This allows individuals to gain an appreciation of other cultures as well as gaining self knowledge and understating on how the local and wider communities operate. Staff possess good knowledge on the young people living at the home and this allows them to successfully manage the peer group dynamic. Staff are receptive to new ways of working and presented ideas on how services could be improved further.

Staff practice engages the young people in a range of activities to develop skills and individual potential through new experiences. Risk assessments support trips out. Staff were busy finalising plans for an adventure weekend prior to returning back to school in September. There are suitable resources available at the home and within the surrounding community. Recreation is clearly linked to developing healthy life styles. Staff encourage individual's aspirations. Some residents select to spend most of their time with their friends in the surrounding community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Key worker relationships are caring and there is good commitment to providing the best possible experiences for the young people. Outcomes for the young people are positive and demonstrate that individualised care is being provided. Statutory reviews take place at the correct frequency enabling plans and targets to be adjusted when individuals needs change. Reports are being produced for each review and meeting. Staff discuss review recommendations ensuring that the young people fully comprehend decisions affecting them.

Key workers communicate and interact with residents on a daily basis to clarify the exact arrangements in place. Rules and boundaries are firmly established and accepted. Detailed written placement plans show the areas of work being addressed. Following some recent changes in the peer group dynamic staff practice is now seen to be proactive. A positive culture has been established at the home opposed to one that is constantly 'fire fighting'. Some sensible negotiations between residents and staff prevented potential areas of conflict impacting on routines.

Practice embraces the Every Child Matters framework that forms part of the government's vision to improve children's services. Efforts enable successful outcomes to be achieved. Plans highlight the response being taken to equality and diversity matters including religion and cultural identity. There is good clarity established within records which provide a permanent overview on all the work that takes place. Information provides a clear account of individual progress and successes as well as the occasional disappointment. The format used for storing

records allows easy access to pertinent information. The young people provide many positive comments on their experiences whilst living at the home and they continue to be fully involved in decisions affecting them. All the young people are treated fairly.

The outcomes being achieved provide clear indicators that referrals and introductions are being successfully matched to staff's skills and experience. Impact assessments support decision making with referrals and these are used to prevent any negative impact on existing residents placement arrangements. It is anticipated that all future referrals will be planned when the home finalises the change to its purpose and function to long term accommodation. Consultation with partner agencies and professionals occur throughout the time that the young people live at the home. The home has a clear child centred philosophy of care outlined within the statement of purpose. The quality of care being provided is to a good standard. Systems are known by staff and sensibly implemented in order that the young people comprehend their full arrangements in place. Contact arrangements are clearly outlined. Key workers go the 'extra mile' in providing transportation for contact visits. Support from advocacy services is available for young people with limited on no family contact.

Communication and appropriate consultation between staff, children and their parents, social workers and other professionals takes place. The evidence base to demonstrate this continues to be developed. The ability of staff to maintain relationships with residents is acknowledged as a key factor in securing placement stability. The staff team work hard to ensure placements remain focussed. The home's management team provides regular summaries on residents' progress through ongoing evaluation of placement plans. This shows a clear commitment to improving the quality of care and experiences being gained at the 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 being developed through statutory review procedures. Assessments include input from residents, staff and social workers. This approach ensures decisions are agreed and areas of responsibility are known from the start. The age and stage of residents' placements meant that formal pathway planning was required for three young people. Assessments had been completed and plans produced for two. Ongoing discussions are taking place to finalise the plan for the other resident.

Pathway plans run in conjunction with other plans and clearly set out placement needs. Placement experiences provided at the home allow residents to gain life skills that will support them into adulthood. Programmes operated, routines followed and placement planning is clearly linked. Access to college placements is integral to planning. This means that the young people are being prepared well for their future.

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 residents has their own bedroom. These areas are being suitably personalised. Bathing facilities are suitable. Bathrooms and toilet 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.

The home is located on a large residential housing estate. Relationships and appropriate links with neighbours and the surrounding community are being maintained. Community resources are frequently utilised by residents. Staff provide advice to young people on how to stay safe when they are out in the community. The home is close to public transport, rail links, health and leisure facilities. Shops and supermarkets are close by, making food shopping easy. Relations with local community police are established.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Quality assurance systems are being used by the home's management team to maintain the home's operation. A good example of this was a communication protocol set up with the responsible individual. In the absence of the Registered Manager, this meant that important information could be shared with Ofsted. The home has remained stable between inspections under the leadership of the Registered Manager and the support provided by three competent assistant managers.

The management team continue to reflect on services being provided and this leads to ongoing improvements. The home has applied for a variation to provide long stay accommodation opposed to short stay. The home's statement of purpose, policy and procedural guidance is being adjusted to show these changes. Importantly, practice has already identified the need to manage future referrals carefully so that there is minimum impact on the other young people living at the home.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Policy and guidance has been produced and some training has been provided. Access to external training is still to be planned. The culture and ethos of the home is continually evolving. The service has been responsive in linking equality and diversity throughout the 24-hour curriculum. Equality and fairness is reflected within staff's practice. Staff are good at listening to residents and allow individuals opportunities to voice their views, opinions and concerns. Transparent communication with residents and social workers demonstrates a real commitment to further improving equality in practice. The young people acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of residents is being addressed to a good standard.

The staff team are competent. Staff hold regular meetings and positive working relationships have been established and this ensures residents experience stable lifestyles. Management support being provided means that staff are clear on their individual roles. Practice overall meets with the requirements of children's homes National Minimum Standards and associated regulations. The staff team are well motivated.

Deployment of staff is good. The needs of the young people are being met whilst ensuring the necessary administrative tasks are undertaken. The competencies and skills staff have continue to grow through access to training. There is access to level 3 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), which is a recognised qualification to work with children and young people. The majority of staff have completed this award. New staff are being enrolled quickly onto this training. There are no barriers or discrimination with who can gain access to training. Management staff

can access level 4 NVQ in care and management. The Registered Manager is completing a suitable management qualification for the post he occupies.

Checks are taking place to monitor the home's operation. Reports are maintained in-house and are made available to those permitted to read them. A new reporting format is used and this contains separate headings outlining any discussions with staff, residents and parents. It is not always possible to consult/communicate with parents during these visits. The management team are gathering other sources of evidence that will help in forming an opinion on the quality of care being provided. This information will be available for the people undertaking monthly visits. The home's management team have a detailed written development plan outlining how the home's operation will be maintained. There is improving use of self-evaluation and reflective practice is recognising areas where further improvements can be made.

The management systems used to record induction, foundation training and supervision provide good detail on the support being provided. The system for managing staff personal development and appraisal are not yet fully integrated and there is insufficient clarity within these management records. There is a record maintained on staff training attended. The record is to be updated when equality and diversity training is provided. Complaints and representations training do not appear on the training overview.

Staff have relevant written guidance, policies and procedures to support their practice. The home's statement of purpose provides good information in accordance with regulations. Aims and objectives as well as the philosophy of care are outlined. Future changes required to these important documents are being planned. Information is easy to access within the office areas. Staff use the guidance to ensure a consistent response continues to be taken to support residents.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- obtain, and retain on file, prior written permission from a person with parental responsibility for each young person, for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication (NMS 13.4)
- ensure all staff complete top-up safeguarding training to support their practice (NMS 17.8)
- complete pathway plans for all those eligible (NMS 6.2)
- improve the clarity of information within management records (NMS 28.7, 31.4, 31.5)

- complete suitable management qualification for the post of Registered Manager. (NMS 34.3)