

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	13/12/2012
Inspector	Stephen Trainor
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Date of last inspection	16/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's residential unit is operated by a local authority and provides care for up to six young people of with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The unit takes emergency placements. Services have also been developed to support young people in need who are registered as refugees.

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 **adequate**.

Young people receive an adequate overall standard of care and they learn how to develop skills suited to building positive relationships. The peer group had changed between inspections and some emergency admissions impacted on the home's stability. Young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour but not all provide their fullest or best cooperation. Young people, with staff support, continue to develop skills that should help them to resolve conflict positively.

Many of the older residents have successfully managed their transition into independence settings. Not all young people have fully committed to education programmes. The home's management have and continue to experience some behaviour management difficulties due to the combination of young people living at the home. Staff skills have been stretched and it has not always been possible to promote the full needs of each child accommodated. The Registered Manager has a good awareness of each resident's needs. Some aspects of individual's placement arrangements are still to be addressed. Alternative placements are a consideration for some.

Young people's placements are supported by detailed behaviour management plans and risk assessments. Some strategies have not worked effectively for some young people. The service continues to respond to individual's presenting needs to resolve safeguarding concerns quickly. The home reports serious concerns transparently. The outcomes of notifications are not always communicated to Ofsted.

There are different partnership arrangements set up to support placements and manage risk taking behaviours. A police 'missing from home coordinator' provides on-going support, advice and guidance to ensure suitable safeguards are in place. Partnership arrangements note that there has been an increase in challenging behaviour and as a result incidents of missing from home, sanctions and physical intervention increased significantly between inspections.

Central to the Registered Manager's development agenda is the need to provide improved continuity with staff practice. The young people have not always followed rules and routines and this prevents safe boundaries being established. This is especially evident with young people smoking in bedrooms. Young people are helped to change behaviours through the good support being coordinated via lots of individual work sessions with key workers.

Monitoring of practice as well as the home's operation and management through Regulation 33 and 34 is established. Report formats have improved between inspections. Reports provide an in depth analysis of information, including the captured views of children, to support continuous improvement and development. Some of the actions identified within these reports have not been addressed in a timely fashion. The home has a development plan that supports improvement. There is limited written evidence to show that the views of social workers, independent reviewing officers and other professionals supporting placements are being sought regularly on the young people's care.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
16 (2001)	ensure the policy for the prevention of bullying in the children's home is implemented effectively (Regulation 16 (4))	25/01/2013
23 (2001)	ensure all parts of the home to which children have access are so far as reasonably practical free from hazards to their health or safety; specifically, actively discourage young people from smoking within their bedrooms. (Regulation 23 (a))	25/01/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff continue to work with each child's education or training provider to

maximise each child's achievements and to minimise underachievement (NMS 8.4)

- ensure that the care and support provided 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 young people develop and practise skills to build and maintain positive relationships and resolve conflict positively (NMS 3.5)
- ensure young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour, in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities (NMS 3.6)
- ensure the children's home only provides admissions to children whose assessed needs they can reasonably meet; specifically, ensure that the combinations of young people living at the home can be supported and managed safely at all times (NMS 11.2)
- ensure the views of the social worker, independent reviewing officer, Local Authority Designated Officer and any other professionals supporting placements are sought regularly on the child's care and these views are recorded (NMS 1.4)
- ensure clear and effective procedures are in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home; in particular, demonstrate how information within Regulation 33 and 34 reports is being evaluated and used to promote continuous improvement and development and show the impact and value that living at the home has had on children and young people's lives (NMS 21.1)
- ensure final outcome statements are recorded and communicated to partners including Ofsted following a notifiable event. (NMS 24.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The personalities making up the peer group can mean relationships fluctuate on a day-to-day basis. Some young people display challenging, aggressive and damaging behaviour. Young people's behaviours are clearly captured within the home's records. Three emergency admissions had impacted negatively on the home's stability.

The staff team under the leadership of the manager are working hard to maintain a compatible peer group dynamic. Staff do not fully demonstrate that they have the skills to meet the collective needs of all six young people. The group dynamic is subject to frequent review especially when linked to presenting safeguarding matters, bullying, missing from home, sanctions, physical intervention and some unpredictable behaviours. Behaviour displayed is having a negative impact on other young people as well as draining staff confidence. The Registered Manager agreed that there is, 'Lots of work in progress'. There is also consideration for alternative placements for young people. Some plans have been agreed and these need to be

implemented.

Not all young people have acquired the skills to differentiate their behaviours to the different settings and situations they find themselves in. Setting and maintaining clear safeguarding parameters for some young people has proved to be a challenge. The Registered Manager works hard to ensure young people build resilience to their personal circumstances. The home's ethos and culture is established and was working well for many years. Unfortunately, there have been many changes to the peer group resulting in many challenges to working practices. Staff persevere with their efforts to secure brighter futures for all young people and affect some change in the negative behaviours shown by some.

There is a wide range of plans to support individual growth and development. However, some young people show intermittent cooperation and this continues to restrict progress. Behaviour management strategies are in place and are regularly reviewed to ensure they remain suitable. Young people do gain confidence in their placements from individual work sessions but some aspects of their behaviours have been slow to change.

Young people's education is an area that could be better supported. This inspection coincided with some young people deciding not to attend school. There have been some exclusions and this restricts attendance. Encouragingly older students have good attendance at college. There is liaison and communication between staff and schools which helps to keep educational arrangements on track. Young people have recently been showing greater commitment to their education arrangements. A support teacher commented that one young person was making good progress with her GCSE studies.

Young people living at the home are treated fairly and staff work hard to support their individual needs. Some young people have a growing optimistic view about their futures. Young people usually select to follow a healthy lifestyle. Young people learn how to take responsibility for their health and make clear links between diet and exercise. Young people are familiar with their health arrangements and are aware of the contents of their health plans. Young people have recently re-engaged with mental health services following a series of cancelled appointments.

Young people's pathway, transition and 'after-care' plans are being established through statutory procedures. Young people gain competencies and life skills through the experiences provided by in-house independence and social skills training programmes. Programmes encourage social presentation skills which are identifiable in how young people conduct themselves at the home and in the surrounding community. All are very well prepared for the world of work and fully aware of options open to them as they move to their next placement and adult life. A number of young people successfully managed the transition to independence between inspections.

Quality of care

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

Impact risk assessments had been used to support referral and introduction procedures but had not been successful in maintaining a compatible peer group dynamic. The Registered Manager shows great insight and understanding of young people's needs. As a result, young people grow to appreciate and value the efforts being made and learn how to work closer with staff in planning their futures. The young people comment favourably on relationships with staff members confirming that they provide good support when they are most in need. The staff team continues to build their knowledge based on young people's histories to enable them to better understanding the individual triggers to their behaviours.

The staff team promote models of care and implement support to influence behaviours positively and enable young people to make better choices. Individual plans are of a good quality, reflecting young people's needs and charting progress where it is made. Social workers receive frequent progress and incident updates. Some young people motivate themselves well to follow their personal programmes. However, there are occasions when day-to-day arrangements and programmes are not followed. Alternatives behaviour management strategies could be introduced quicker to encourage young people to take more responsibility for their behaviour.

Partnership arrangements are set up. Communication takes place on an on-going basis between staff, young people, parents and carers, social workers and other professionals. Clear communication helps to reduce any potential confusion with the arrangements in place for each young person, for example contact arrangements. A mother commented, 'Communication had always been clear especially from the Registered Manager.' Independent reviewing officers and social workers also confirmed consistent approaches, including clear communication.

Developing educational potential forms part of the home's philosophy of care. Care staff emphasise the importance of young people gaining the best education. The young people show that they can commit to their education and improve their attendance records. Young people can also gain certificates of personal effectiveness outside of the school timetable and these highlight growth and developed.

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.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted to ensure young people can make informed decisions on how they can keep themselves safe. Support services including a looked after children's nurse provides advice on relationships and sexual health. Smoking cessation support has had little impact in changing habits. Young people are more aware of the dangers of alcohol abuse from the programmes they have attended. Medication is stored safely, and records are maintained on the administration of medication. A controlled drugs register is maintained. An accurate medicines audit

was provided. There are clear policies and procedural guidance and these are followed in practice. Staff receive suitable training to support health and well-being and this maintains the quality of health care being provided.

A central part to staff practice is maintaining the balance between organised activities and young people's free time. Efforts to engage young people in activities that develop individual potential and enhance learning opportunities are provided.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people confirm that they feel safe living at the home most of the time. They slowly learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour. The number of incidents young people are involved in had recently started to reduce as they start to show more commitment to their placements. Young people understand the many forms that bullying can take and are equally clear about what to do if they have any concerns. Bullying had been a concern between inspections. Incidents are reported and investigated in line with safeguarding procedures.

Young people have suitable safeguarding and complaints information and they are made aware of the content of this information. 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. Staff make it very clear that young people will not suffer any recrimination if complaints and grumbles are made.

Systems for dealing with young people who go missing from home are well established and a protocol is set out. Risk assessments take account of a young person's potential to go missing. Young people do not always show that they understand the dangers and risks of leaving the home without permission. Relationships with local police are established. Reports made to local police are in line with the established protocol. A recent change to the protocol was being worked through to ensure staffing at night would be suitable to undertake a range of searches prior to reports being made to police. The home's management hold frequent discussions with the local police 'missing from home coordinator' to review matters affecting the home. The local police commented that there had been, 'A massive increase in reports.' Detailed records are maintained each time young people go missing. Management review all incidents. Standard practice at the home is to provide young people with the opportunity to reflect on incidents they are involved in. Some young people received police prosecutions for offences between inspections.

Staff uphold children's rights. Young people respond well to praise and there is good use of positive reinforcement. The Registered Manager monitors the effectiveness of sanctions. Sanctions or consequences when applied are not always effective to affect changes in behaviour. Respectful communication was evident throughout most of this inspection between young people, staff and Ofsted. The number of incidents

requiring physical intervention linked to the present residents was explored. Young people did not express any concerns regarding the use of physical intervention. Staff are clear that physical intervention is very much a last resort. All staff receive regular and refresher training in positive handling techniques to ensure safe practice.

Good recruitment practice is consistently being followed. Robust procedures ensure each staff member has an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check prior to starting work. Good practice also ensures the vetting of visitors to safeguard young people.

The appearance of the accommodation is being maintained to a satisfactory level. Damage to the premises is repaired promptly. Health and safety are managed well in most areas, but concerns remain regarding young people's smoking habits within bedrooms. Regular servicing of equipment and routine safety checks maintain a safe environment other than the smoking issue. 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 an 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 **adequate**.

The home is managed by a vastly experienced and qualified manager who is registered with Ofsted. The manager is working hard to ensure the staff team deliver good quality practice consistently. Some young people's behaviours continue to create challenges and this impacts negatively on routines, the home's operation and management. Given some more time, the Registered Manager is confident that the staff team will be in a better position to meet the specific needs of each individual living at the home. Plans to access alternative placements for some young people had been agreed. Young people and staff are not yet aware of the timeline that they are working to.

The service remains child-focused; however, young people have not always provided their best cooperation and this has impacted on safeguarding, quality and outcome judgments. The Registered Manager provides a clear vision for how the home should operate. Practice adjustments continue to be made in line with a changed inspection framework, evaluation schedule, regulations and national minimum standards. The quality of working practices remain high in many areas as the home responds to both individual and group members presenting challenges. It is the intention of the management team for all levels of staff to influence and shape the service with their ideas.

The home's management team showed that it is perceptive in identifying the home's strengths and the areas where it could perform better. The home's Registered Manager provided an accurate verbal assessment of the service, setting some realistic targets to get the staff team up to speed. The Registered Manager receives good line management support to develop services.

Internal and external monitoring systems linked to Regulation 33 and 34 reporting are set up and these support quality assurance. Monthly visits provide a snapshot in time of what it is like to live in the home. Reports evaluate and analyse processes and data but have not had much influence in driving forward change. Identifiable patterns, trends and concerns are not being responded to in a timely way, lessons are not being learned. Many actions are being repeated within these reports. Management strategies have had limited impact on reducing certain types of incidents. The full impact and value that living at this home has had on young people's lives is not fully represented within these reports.

The home has a development plan that supports improvement. Limited information was presented to show how the home was gathering the views, wishes and feelings of partners and those significant to children, including independent reviewing officers.

The young people have confidence in the staff team and know who is responsible for them at all times of the day and night. Staff are experienced and have completed relevant qualifications. Staff have access to suitable training to further enhance their skills sets and many staff members champion specific roles to further develop services. Staff confirmed that they receive good levels of support. Suitable management records are held in-house to show the levels of support being provided.

There is a system in place to notify persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events. Suitable reporting was evident with regard to incidents between inspections. The responsible authority had not always informed Ofsted when outcomes of incidents are known. Records are kept safe and secure within the home. A requirement and two recommendations set at the last inspection had led to improvements to Regulation 33 and 34 reporting including better consultation with young people. Young people's school attendance records are also being maintained in a clear format. No concerns or complaints were investigated by Ofsted between inspections. Information provided by the Local Authority designated Officer highlighted no concerns.

Staff practice is supported by written guidance, policies and procedures. The home's Statement of Purpose provides information in accordance with regulations. The aims and objectives are outlined and emergency or 'immediate' placements are permitted. This report clearly highlights the impact this type of placement can have on the home's stability, ethos and working practices.

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 children's homes.