

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

This children's home is operated by a local authority and is registered to care for up to six children and young people of both genders, from the age of 13 years up to 17 years old. At the time of the inspection, five young people were living at the home. It was possible to speak to all five about the quality of care being received.

The home cares for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Services have also been developed to support young people in need, who are registered as refugees. The house is detached and situated a few miles from a large town centre. There are sufficient rooms, where the young people can pursue their leisure interests and hobbies. All bedrooms are single occupancy. The home was completely refurbished and extended in October 2007. Some of the large garden at the rear of the home was used for a bedroom extension and a conservatory.

The children and young people can gain access to parks, the cinema and sports and athletics facilities. Bus routes connect the home with the local community, places of worship and the national rail link. 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.

The inspection was unannounced and undertaken over a two day period. 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 was also evaluated.

The operation of this home is managed well under the leadership of the qualified and experienced Registered Manager. Staff practice provides a high standard of care and the support provided enables young people to achieve and develop 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 very good and there is good cooperation especially in setting appropriate boundaries. The young people have chosen to lead stable lifestyles. There is good emphasis on gaining important life skills. Pathway and aftercare programmes are integral to each resident's arrangements. Staff liaise closely with social workers and other agencies to plan young people's futures. Each plan is implemented well. Residents know their arrangements and remain clearly focused on their futures.

The promotion of young people's health and well-being is good. Recreational interests are clearly supported. Opportunities for foreign holidays are afforded. Young people's efforts are clearly rewarded.

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 team plan outlining how standards will be maintained.

This report highlights some recommendations to support practice developments. Staff developmental objectives are not clearly outlined in management records. Information is limited in some areas to show how evaluative and reflective practice is being used to shape services beyond minimum standards. The main home computer was broken and this limited access to important sources of information.

Improvements since the last inspection

Recommendations made at the last inspection have been suitably addressed. Staff received additional input and specific training to further enhance practice linked to equality and diversity matters. The number of staff holding National Vocational Qualification at level 3 increased to the desired level. The clarity of induction, training attended and supervision records improved. A review of personnel files was undertaken and all are now being maintained in the same format.

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. A local surgery supports medicine management. Parental permissions for emergency treatment, and for administering medicines and first aid had been gained.

Policy and procedural guidance to support health and well-being is clear. These have been developed 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 were checked and found to comply with guidance. Medicines are stored safely.

The management team work hard to ensure full health histories are being gained as part of the referral and introduction procedures. Where this is not possible a coordinated and sustained effort is made to ensure relevant information is gained as soon as is practical following admission. Good practice in the past has included coordinated efforts to support the needs of refugees where there is limited information. Issues identified within referral documents are promptly discussed. 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.

The key worker role is well developed to deliver health promotion work covering matters, such as sexual relationships, smoking cessation, drug misuse and healthy living. Collaborative links with different professionals and agencies are established and this allows helpful guidance and support to be provided. Specialist advice and help is organised to support mental health when required. The staff at the home have had good success in encouraging the young people to engage with supportive services.

Routine medical, optical and dental appointments are organised by key workers. Good relationships are established with a looked after children nurse. Statutory medical examinations are organised. Refusals are recorded. Staff reassure young people if they have concerns about treatments. Key worker support is helping young people to lead safe and healthier lives.

Catering arrangements are being managed well. Menus are planned with the young people and staff encourage the young people to eat healthily. Residents clearly recognise links between good diet and exercise to remain healthy. They work closely alongside staff in preparing meals and many have developed skills through independence training to enable them to prepare their own meals. Some specific food preparation techniques are used in line with residents needs. Independence training is a key focus of all placements. Staff are proactive in planning support for cultural and religious festivals. All the young people have developed an understanding and appreciation of different cultures allowing beliefs and faiths to be followed. Young people appreciate the efforts staff make to celebrate their birthdays.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Staff work closely with the young people. Their hard work means that the young people living at the home remain 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. Differences are worked out sensibly and 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 home's Registered Manager has made good use of impact assessments to ensure the group remains stable.

Accurate records are maintained showing the home is managed well, providing

suitable physical safety and security for each individual. The young people commented that they felt safe. 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. They are aware of the contents of their information and they acknowledge that people suffer no recrimination if complaints and grumbles are made. All the young people are confident to voice any concerns that they might have.

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 now 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. The effectiveness of sanctions, when used, are evaluated. 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. Information provided on outcome statements linked to each notification are satisfactory. There is a well established missing from home protocol. Strategies to reduce the number of reports being made to police have had good success.

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. The recording of fire drills is clear. A brief tour of the accommodation revealed no hazards to young people's safety. A range of risk assessments have been produced to support practice.

Personnel files have been overhauled between inspections to ensure information is stored in the same format. A random selection of personnel files were viewed. Files are well organised. 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. The level of information required to show how decisions are reached when making staff appointments was discussed. 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 outstanding.

Individual needs are outlined within a range of plans including placement plans, risk assessments and health plans. Clear records are maintained on the work being undertaken. Staff have an impressive knowledge and understanding of young people's needs enabling a timely individual response to be taken when young people are most in need. Key worker support is coordinated extremely well. An efficient multidisciplinary framework of support ensures young people continually make progress and achieve goals. The young people have developed a clear understanding and appreciation of their personal circumstances and they are working with staff in planning for their futures. Young people are self-motivated and extremely optimistic about their futures.

Developing educational potential forms a clear part of the home's philosophy of care. Staff have continually emphasised the importance of gaining a good education and encouraged school attendance. All the young people have successfully completed their compulsory secondary school education. Further education and employment is now the focus for each resident. There is good attendance and young people are very clear on what they want for their futures and show excellent commitment towards their plans. Young people's successes are celebrated frequently.

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. The correct balance has been achieved between organised activities and young people's free time. 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. Foreign holidays provided good learning experiences.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

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. The role of the key worker is well developed. Staff deliver high quality support. 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 many positive comments on their experiences at the home. Staff practice has led to a great deal of stability in the lives of the young people.

Referral procedures are managed well. Each admission is planned carefully. Impact assessments have been used for a long time at this home. Both the needs of the child concerned, and the likely effects of the admission upon the existing group of

residents, are taken into account. Reviews occur at the correct frequency allowing placement plans to be monitored. Reports are prepared for each review. Key workers ensure targets are met.

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. Transitional planning for the time that young people move on from the home is also being managed efficiently. Extremely complimentary comments are captured in residents 'exit' interview questionnaires.

Contact arrangements are established for each young person. There is support from independent listeners. Staff have a good understanding of family histories. A suitable and sensible checking process had 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. Expressed opinions and feedback are welcomed at this home. New ways of gaining information are being introduced. The Registered Manager evaluates information and data to identify future improvements and developments.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

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, social workers and after care support teams. This approach ensures decisions are agreed and areas of responsibility are known from the start. A highly efficient response is being taken to support the specific needs of each young person. Key workers ensure plans remain focussed. Progress is being made on many fronts.

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 prepare them for the world of work. Access to college placements remains integral to planning. Young people work hard to secure themselves better futures.

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 home's computer was broke and awaiting repair. 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. There is efficient maintenance. 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 whole accommodation remains clean and tidy.

Relationships and appropriate links with neighbours, shop keepers 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 home remained stable between inspections. The Registered Manager is experienced, has a clear management philosophy and holds relevant qualifications. 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 outstanding. The services coordinated are truly individualised to support the specific needs of the young people. Equality and diversity is established within the culture and ethos of the home. The role of an 'equality champion' has been extremely influential in shaping services and developing staff knowledge and awareness. 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 addressed to a high standard. There is clear policy and guidance. Ongoing training is being provided. Some specific training linked to fairness was being rolled out. 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 demonstrates a real commitment to continually improving equality and diversity in practice.

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. The new system lacks any meaningful detail or data at present. The Registered Manager remains committed to capturing and responding to emerging themes. Expressed views are now being captured to shape services beyond minimum standards. The Registered Manager discussed ideas for robust self evaluation for future inspections.

Records at this home show good 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. Records on staff personal development and appraisal are not as clear as the other management records.

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 few change between inspections. Staff sickness is managed well. Continuity with staff practice is maintained. 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.

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 young people have suitable access to computers and the internet (NMS 14.5)
- establish a robust evidence base to demonstrate that the systems being used to monitor the home's operation and performance are effective; specifically demonstrate how evaluative and reflective practice is shaping services beyond minimum standards (NMS 33.1)
- establish clear developmental objectives for staff by better linking supervision, personal development plans and the appraisal process. (NMS 28.4 & 28.7)