

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Martin
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is provided by a local authority and is registered to care for up to six young people with emotional or 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 **good**.

This home is currently enjoying a settled period in which young people are making good progress. This is attributable to stable leadership, the growing maturity of young people and the establishment of the home as a medium- to long-term service. Staffing levels are good, enabling them to meet the individual needs of young people and to implement placement plans effectively. Young people's health and educational needs are met appropriately and there are strong measures in place to keep young people safe. Young people rarely go missing and none are currently involved in offending behaviour. Relationships between staff and young people are positive and their interaction is good humoured and mutually respectful. Confrontational and challenging behaviour is infrequent and is managed without the need for physical intervention. There were no breaches of regulation identified during this inspection. However, three recommendations are raised to further improve practice. These relate to the effectiveness of measures to help young people understand the harmful effects of smoking, the qualifications held by staff, and communication with young people's parents.

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 there are effective strategies in place to promote the health needs of young people, with particular reference to assisting them in understanding the

harmful effects of smoking (NMS 6)

- ensure all staff recruited before 1 April 2011 have attained the Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma or a minimum level 3 qualification relevant to caring for children and young people (NMS 18.5)
- ensure that young people's parents are consulted appropriately on all aspects of their care. (NMS 1.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are sociable, good humoured and confident. They are able to develop their self-esteem and learn to manage personal challenges with resilience. They have opportunities through individual link worker sessions and therapeutic service to explore events from their past and to consider the impact that this has had on them. For some young people this has had very positive outcomes. Young people value their relationships with staff, who provide them with positive role models. This makes a significant contribution to the emotional well-being of young people.

Generally, young people enjoy good health and understand the importance of eating well and leading an active lifestyle. They are registered with primary health care providers in the local community and can access specialist services as and when they need to. This ensures that all their health care needs can be met promptly. Some of the young people have previously used solvents and illegal drugs but this behaviour has declined considerably in recent months. Some of the young people are regular smokers and, to date, have not engaged successfully with smoking cessation services. This is potentially harmful to their health in the long-term.

Young people are actively engaged with their education and are achieving well in line with their abilities and previous experiences of school. Young people who have completed statutory schooling are looking forward to participating in further training, college placements and apprenticeships. They have individual pathway plans, as appropriate, and input from leaving care services. Young people benefit from the home's positive approach to promoting the value of education.

Young people have excellent opportunities to share their views and contribute positively to decision making in the home and the wider community. They have regular house meetings with the Children's Rights Officer and the minutes are scrutinised by council members as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Some young people are very active members of the Children in Care Council, enabling them to share their views with staff from the highest levels of the authority. On an individual basis young people participate in their reviews and make written and electronic submissions. They have very good relationships with their reviewing officers and are confident about contacting them to tell them good news or their concerns. Young people are encouraged to share their opinions and make the most of their opportunities to do so.

Young people have contact with their families in line with their wishes or as directed by the local authority. The arrangements are set out in individual placement plans, ensuring that contact is facilitated safely.

Although some young people have previously been involved in offending, this behaviour has reduced considerably in recent months. This is attributable to the settled and stable environment provided by the home and the growing maturity of young people.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy strong relationships with staff. Their interactions are mutually respectful and good natured. Young people feel that the staff are concerned about their welfare and want to provide them with positive experiences of care. One young person said that they had been, 'scared about coming into residential care but it's been good.' The staff are actively engaged with young people to ensure that they are using their time constructively.

As noted above, the young people have a wide range of opportunities to share their views about their personal care and the day-to-day running of the home. Staff, including senior managers from the local authority, are actively listening to and implementing their suggestions wherever possible. Young people are provided with and accept explanations when their wishes cannot be acted on. One positive development that has come out of this process is that young people will be able to contribute to the staff meeting agenda on a quarterly basis. The approach taken by the local authority ensures that young people are heard and that their views are taken seriously.

Young people are aware of the complaints procedure and have used it to air their grievances. Complaints are investigated and resolved appropriately to the satisfaction of young people. Young people are well supported through the complaints process and have good access to advocacy and children's rights.

Young people are looked after in line with their placement plans. The plans and all supporting documents are well written. They capture clearly and concisely young people's histories, their health and educational needs and the potential for risk and harm. This enables staff to provide young people with support and guidance in a consistent, individualised and safe way.

The home is safely maintained and provides young people with a pleasant, comfortable environment. Resources have been made available to ensure that the home is well decorated and furnished to a good standard. One longstanding member of staff said that the home, 'is looking the best it ever has.'

Staff are fulfilling their responsibilities to liaise with fellow professionals and to keep other agencies involved with the young people informed and up to date. One area

where this has been particularly successful is in the pastoral care of some young people who still attend school. Regular contact with school ensures that young people receive the emotional support they need to remain engaged with their education and are motivated to do well. In some cases, young people have attained 100% attendance even where this involves lengthy and time-consuming journeys. Staff have also supported young people to secure apprenticeships. The home's approach ensures that young people can take a positive view of their future training and educational needs.

Young people have a wide range of interests and hobbies including music and song writing, outdoor pursuits and baking. They are supported on an individual basis to enjoy the activities they have chosen. This ensures that young people have good opportunities to make constructive use of their leisure time.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe and that the staff are protecting them from harm. Although the young people do not always get on with each other, incidents of bullying are infrequent. As and when these do occur, these are dealt with effectively through restorative practices. The staff team is aware of the need to protect young people from individual and organised sexual exploitation. Currently none of the young people are putting themselves in harm's way. Young people's vulnerabilities are well documented in individual risk assessments which clearly set out the steps in place to protect young people from harm. This contributes to the overall safety and well-being of young people.

Young people rarely go missing from the home. If and when they do, the staff make all appropriate checks and contact agencies, such as the police, in line with agreed protocols. They are proactive in their attempts to maintain contact with young people who are absent. All incidents are evaluated by the Registered Manager to identify possible triggers to their behaviour. The Children's Rights Officer follows up all absences with a meeting with the young people to enable them to discuss the incident safely with a trusted independent adult. The measures in place minimise the risks of young people going missing and protect them if they do.

Generally, the young people behave in a sociable way and have developed the skills to convey their wishes and needs without the need for confrontation. The staff are actively involved in promoting change through negotiation and restorative practice. This provides young people with an opportunity to internalise controls to their behaviour. Restraint is not used and incidents requiring physical intervention to guide young people away from trouble are rare. Similarly, sanctions are used infrequently and in all cases are evaluated to consider whether they have been effective or not. Young people benefit from living in a home where there is an established culture of cooperation and positive behaviour.

There are no ongoing safeguarding issues concerning the young people. The staff

are familiar with the local child protection and safeguarding procedures and are confident in their ability to manage concerns or disclosures. They have completed safeguarding training and have a good understanding of their responsibilities to protect young people from harm. This ensures that young people are looked after safely.

Leadership and management

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

The home is managed well. There is a full-time, permanent manager who has been registered with Ofsted for 16 months. She is suitably qualified and has experience of working with children and young people with a wide range of needs. This provides the home with stable and consistent leadership.

There are sufficient numbers of staff employed in the home to enable them to undertake work with young people on an individual basis. Handover is used to plan shifts and ensure that young people are supported and supervised safely.

The staff have regular, individual supervision which provides them with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and to identify personal development needs. Staff have completed mandatory training and have access to ongoing training through the local authority. At the last inspection a recommendation was made concerning the need for all staff employed prior to April 2011 to obtain a minimum level three qualifications. To date this has not been achieved to further secure staff's learning and development.

The quality of the service provided by the home is regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure that it continues to operate in the best interests of young people. Independent visits to the home are undertaken in line with the requirements of Regulation 33 and the manager assesses activity in the home on a monthly basis as required by Regulation 34. Both processes challenge the home to implement improvements where the need is identified. The home has a positive approach to complaints and takes the opportunity to reflect on the points that they raise. There is an annual development plan which aims to consolidate progress and to identify any further improvements that are required. The measures in place ensure that young people continue to receive a good quality service.

The Statement of Purpose is up to date and provides a comprehensive guide to the home. This ensures that placing authorities know what they can expect of the service and can make considered decisions as to whether the home can provide young people with a service which will meet their needs. In the last few months the home has established itself as a unit for young people requiring medium- to long-term placements. This has made a significant contribution to the stability that the home currently enjoys.

Generally, the home communicates well with fellow professionals and parents. However, on the day of inspection a parent raised a concern that they had not been

given sufficient notice of a specific issue relating to the health care needs of their child. The home confirmed that this was the case and had offered an apology. The matter was resolved promptly but the situation indicates that the home does not always seek the views of parents on their children's care. Therefore, this does not fully meet the needs of young people.

All records are maintained in good order and are stored securely. This ensures that information about young people is held confidentially.

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.