

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

Aycliffe Young People's Centre is managed by Durham County Council and forms their secure services provision. It is located in grounds belonging to the council, which it shares with other council facilities.

The provision cares for boys and girls and is registered as a children's home. It is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure accommodation for up to 43 young people, between 10 years and 18 years of age.

Children under the age of 13 years placed under section 25 of the Children Act 1989, may only be placed after prior approval by the Secretary of State.

Aycliffe Young People's Centre comprises four different residential houses which are Heron, Siskin, Merlin and Royston. There is also a school, swimming pool, gym and play courts on site for use by young people. Recent building work, including the expansion of the secure perimeter has created the availability of vocational studios and external areas for horticulture and vocational trade training.

There were twenty one young people resident at the time of the inspection.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is an announced inspection to evaluate the quality of care, education and security at Aycliffe Young People's Centre. The inspection has the purpose of informing the Secretary of State on the continuing suitability of the secure centre to restrict children's liberty along with ensuring compliance with the children's homes regulations.

All of the national minimum standards for children's homes and the added standards agreed with DCSF for approval inspections were looked at during the inspection. The formal education provision at the centre was also inspected.

Strengths of the centre include safeguarding practices, health provision for young people and planning for their time at the centre and the future. Areas requiring development include the presentation of the premises, formal support for staff members and some areas of formal education.

There is an experienced management team in place at the centre who have recently undergone a reorganisation to ensure leadership and guidance is provided in the most productive manner.

As a result of the inspection a recommendation will be made to the Secretary of State for a three year approval to be given for Aycliffe Young People's Centre to restrict children's liberty.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection there were two actions identified which the management of the centre were required to carry out. They were required to ensure that the daily log held whilst reflecting the events occurring, did not include confidential information relating to young people. The logs which are held on each house unit now contain only a brief summary of the occurrence and signpost the reader to where further information may be found. This ensures that information held about young people is done so in a confidential manner.

A requirement was also made that all staff receive formal supervision as described in the national minimum standards. There has been a considerable improvement in the level of completed supervision since the last inspection with some months seeing 100% of completed sessions. However a recent slippage has seen some house units fall to a 70% completion figure. This therefore remains an area requiring development to ensure staff are fully supported to carry out their work with young people.

A recommendation was made, that the centres management should consider the introduction of alternative methods, of advising and informing young people entering the centre who may have limited communication skills. The expectations of the centre and young peoples rights and responsibilities are now available in a range of formats, from the written word to cartoon booklets and DVDs or computer programmes. This means that young people can be fully informed about the centre regardless of their literacy or communication level.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

There has been a significant improvement in the quality and choice of food served. This coincides with the recent appointment of a new catering manager, who has increased the number of choices available at each meal. Menus include a vegetarian option and more cultural varieties, underpinned with a greater emphasis on nutritional balance. Young people are canvassed about their views on choice, quality and arrangements for serving food and responses are positive and constructive. The catering manager replies to any comments made. The centre has achieved the healthy schools award and promotes health eating with fresh fruit freely available every day. Mealtimes are well organised with staff and young people sharing a meal and creating an environment for social interaction. Young people are able to enjoy nutritious and healthy meals at the centre.

The health needs of young people are promoted positively. Appropriate access is

available to doctors, dentists, opticians and other specialised medical health services. A mental health assessment is undertaken shortly after arrival at the centre, this is supported by good psychiatric and psychological oversight. A psychiatrist chairs a monthly meeting with staff, which reviews any mental health plans in place for young people.

Good systems are in place to gather health information about new admissions and create an initial health plan. This is carried out by nursing staff, who obtain any missing information and commence the process to ensure the various written consents required are in place.

The content of the health plans is comprehensive and includes any specific health, cultural or dietary needs a young person may make known. A copy of the plan is provided to the house unit where the young person resides. Systems to regularly review and update plans are in place. Young people are provided with a copy of their plan along with other relevant information when they leave the centre. This information enables them to receive consistency of care in following placements. The system in place ensures that health needs are identified and promoted.

Medication is stored securely and records of any controlled, prescribed and non prescribed medication are comprehensively completed. The stock of medication is monitored regularly by a nominated staff member and a health professional, with checks of stock made against records held. Staff receive regular and where necessary, updated training on areas relevant to young people's health needs. During basic induction and core training, staff members learn about areas such as food hygiene, first aid and safe handling of medication. Only staff who are trained administer medication to young people. A first aid trained member of staff is available each shift and there are well stocked first aid boxes throughout the centre. Records are held of any accident occurring. Policies and procedures are in place to support staff to ensure young people's welfare is safeguarded.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The procedures and practice at the centre effectively promote respect for young people and their dignity and privacy. Privacy is safeguarded for example by the use of curtains where appropriate and information about young people is confidentially managed.

Young people are protected by a robust and well monitored complaints procedure. Complaints are addressed appropriately through explicit and transparent procedures which allow young people to make representation directly or through other agencies. Good practice is undertaken with procedures externally monitored by an independent person from the authority, which allows young people to be kept informed and to comment on the outcome.

Young people are also well protected from abuse through effective safeguarding

procedures that ensure that their welfare is promoted. These involve a good level of multi disciplinary working and liaison with other agencies. Responses to allegations, disclosures or suspicion of abuse are routinely appropriate.

The centre has developed a very high level of expertise in identifying risk and protecting young people from bullying. Bullying is challenged quickly and vigorously when and if it occurs. Emphasis where possible is placed upon mediation and resolution of issues.

There are very effective and well established security measures at the centre to ensure that young people and the community are kept safe. The centre has clear and child centred procedures to address the risk of absconding and to ensure that any episodes of or attempted absconding are dealt with appropriately. Young people who may try to abscond are identified and steps taken to protect them. Positive risk assessments promote mobility for young people, such that they are enabled to manage a planned and gradual re integration back into the community where possible and appropriate.

The centre has good procedures in place that ensure that all significant events related to the safety and protection of young people are notified quickly and appropriately to the relevant agencies. These protect young people effectively by ensuring that these agencies remain aware of what is happening at the centre and therefore able to support young people appropriately.

A child centred behaviour management strategy that rewards positive progress is the key focus for engaging the challenging behaviour that young people may demonstrate. The behaviour of young people is managed positively and without undue recourse to the threat or use of sanction, restraint or separation. This is done through the use of an incentive bonus scheme designed to recognise and reward individual progress. Positively, young people have been involved in the design and evaluation of the system.

There is very clear guidance for staff on behaviour management, together with highly effective mechanisms in place to record and monitor carefully any use of restraint, separation or sanction. This helps to ensure that young people are dealt with appropriately.

The centre has clear procedures in place known to security staff and managers to ensure that staff and young people are protected from fire and other hazards, and effective arrangements are in place to ensure that emergency services are able to respond to incidents quickly and appropriately. This enables young people to live in an environment that provides physical safety and security.

The authority's recruitment and vetting procedures are robust and ensure that all staff and volunteers who have access to young people are fit to do so, and care is taken to ensure that those who transport young people have been appropriately approved.

Young people are safeguarded by very effective measures in place to identify, assess and manage self harming behaviour. Good review procedures routinely ensure that risk assessments are accurate and individual plans are in place that reflect the vulnerability of young people and guide staff to support them.

There is a high level of support young people to address offending and other behaviours which may have got them into trouble in the community. They are helped to gain increased self control and to manage their own difficult and challenging behaviours more effectively in areas of personal or social need. The work carried out is tailored closely to individual need.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The overall effectiveness of education provision at Aycliffe Young People's Centre is good.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Most courses lead to relevant progress and accreditation to help meet the needs of young people. Academic subjects and work related courses prepare young people well for resettlement. Curriculum subjects are now more effectively linked to assessment, and there is a new focus on dual awards. All young people experience some form of success, and many gain either AQA units, literacy and numeracy awards, key skills, GCSE qualifications and/or vocationally based knowledge and skills. For many this is their first experience of personal achievement in education. Some young people have also experienced success through the Koestler Award Scheme and successfully exhibited art work at established venues. However, while some young people are successful with the key skills on-line tests, their portfolio development is currently incomplete.

The standard of young people's work is variable with examples of both very good and satisfactory pieces of class work. Young people generally make good progress, but particularly if their stay is longer than 2 months. However, target setting to help young people progress is variable. Behaviour in lessons is mixed and ranges from good to occasionally unacceptable. Most teachers are able to address effectively any challenging behaviour. Levels of attendance are good, although punctuality is not monitored or evaluated.

Teaching and learning are good. In the better lessons young people are enjoying and engaging in learning, responsive, successfully completing tasks and answering questions appropriately. Good teaching reflects teachers differentiating their approach and method to meet the individual needs of young people. Detailed schemes of work and rigorous but flexible lesson planning are also evident. Satisfactory lessons include tasks that are not sufficiently challenging, targets that are not specific and key skills that are not fully embedded. Initial assessment effectively identified literacy and numeracy needs and preferred learning style. Where appropriate, further diagnostic testing establishes additional support needs.

Facilities and resources to support learning are very good. All classrooms have computers and young people have controlled access to the internet. Interactive whiteboards are installed in most classrooms, although not all staff are sufficiently confident and skilled to use this technology. High quality classrooms and specialist areas support academic learning and vocational skills development very well. A well resourced and comfortable library is now available for use by both young people and staff.

The range and quality of the curriculum are good. The curriculum broadly satisfies the requirements of the national curriculum, the YJB specification and the needs of young people. The curriculum now provides a well balanced mix of academic, creative, practical and vocational subjects. Classes are streamed effectively by age and assessed ability. The timetable is flexible to meet the needs of young people. Well planned and themed enrichment activities are provided involving care staff, some teaching assistants and external visitors.

The centre is responding well to the 14-19 curriculum developments. In addition to a programme of general education, young people can select from a very wide range of vocational options. The centre is hoping to participate in the new diplomas, and is beginning to explore with other local schools how some of the potential barriers around work placements can be overcome. Positive links exist with the local education authority, and the centre is working well with the school improvement partner. The centre has developed good arrangements to work with other external organisations who can provide specialist services such as counselling and interpretation services.

The quality of guidance and support is good. Induction is well planned and managed. A well qualified and experienced special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) has been appointed recently. A clear literacy strategy is now in place. Young people with literacy and numeracy needs are receiving good support. Provision for young people with special educational needs is being developed effectively. Good use is made of the library to provide some of this support. Nurture groups and reading schemes are daily timetabled activities for young people. Tutor groups meet each morning and give young people the opportunity to review and evaluate the timetable and their learning. The Student Council provides a useful opportunity for young people to voice their opinions and concerns about both education and care issues. Where appropriate, staff introduce improvements. Education make a positive contribution to all review meetings. More effective working between teachers and teaching assistants is beginning to provide meaningful support for young people in the classroom. Good attention is paid to risk assessment and promoting safe behaviour in the classroom and outside.

Information, advice and guidance has improved and is now broadly satisfactory. The Connexions adviser is helpful and often sees three or four young people at each weekly visit to provide one-to-one support. This supplements the good personal support from both education and care staff. However, careers information is not available in the library and is not embedded across the curriculum.

Education leadership and management are satisfactory. Most operational procedures are carried out appropriately, and the broad curriculum is delivered effectively. New managers and staff are provided with good support to help them to carry out their roles. Most staff are committed to the progress and achievement made by young people. Staff are well informed through regular meetings and both formal and informal communication is broadly satisfactory. Supervision, appraisal and training effectively supports staff in their development. However, target setting and performance management is not always linked to the centre's key objectives and improvement plan. The resources and specialist equipment to support learning are very good.

The most recent self evaluation report is more evaluative than previous reports but is still not sufficiently strategic, critical, inclusive and supported by the use of data. Nevertheless, the report accurately identified many of the strengths and areas for improvement. The management information system does not provide easily accessible and meaningful information to identify trends and areas for action and improvement. Insufficient quality assurance arrangements are in place to promote consistency and standardisation of practice between curriculum areas. For example, links with external organisations to share good practice and promote a more outward facing culture are under-developed, the observation of teaching and learning scheme does not clearly and consistently identify how staff can improve their teaching through detailed targets, and systems to better record, assess and monitor young people's targets, progress and resettlement outcomes lack rigour.

A staff member is employed at the centre whose role is to facilitate the planning and occurrence of activities and enrichment. There are support staff available to assist in this. During periods when formal education is not operating, there are themed weeks held covering areas such as the environment, culture and health promotion. Subject areas which encompass traditions in other countries are especially popular with young people. The weeks enable young people to learn whilst enjoying taking part in a range of activities. Guidance for staff and a full evaluation of events is in place. The evaluations are used to clarify the success of sessions held and identify any changes which may be required.

During non formal education time, young people are encouraged to participate in a wide range of leisure activities. They are able to contribute to the make up of the activities programme via the Student Council and Investors in Children meetings. There is a combination of planned activities and those which occur following negotiation between staff and young people available each evening. There is a sports hall, swimming pool and outdoor play areas available. Each house unit has an area allocated to them for use on each evening. There are also a number of indoor leisure pursuits which occur such as cooking, health and beauty, art and crafts, indoor games and television/DVD club available. Whilst some formal clubs are accessible only to young people on higher incentive levels, there are opportunities for all to partake in some type of activity.

Young people's participation is recorded and encouragement is given to them to take part in a range of activities. The range of activities available meets young people's

leisure and learning needs and the level of participation is high. Vocational activities are increasing in accessibility. Whilst the majority of these continue to occur during the school day, there is some use of horticulture and health and beauty facilities during evenings. A smoothie bar which allows young people to experience producing a product and marketing it is available.

There are good relationships in place with some external groups, notably the Royal Navy and a local professional football club who visit to undertake sessions with the young people. Young people are also able to access the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme at the centre should they wish.

Care staff support young people's education, some of the middle management team are now based in the education building and are readily accessible to young people. Staff on the house units offer support in completion of homework and ensuring young people arrive at school on time and with the correct equipment. Young people are also assisted to access relevant books or computer information if required to supplement their work.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Comprehensive records are maintained on each young person. Each case file includes the information required by regulation and procedure, and clearly identifies the reason for admission to secure care, and individual plans to reflect religious, cultural and ethnic needs.

Young people have their needs assessed fully. The assessments are reflected in written training or placement plans which outline how these needs will be met. They include contributions from a range of professionals working directly with young people to address identified areas of need.

There are effective and well managed procedures in place to ensure that young people's progress is reviewed regularly and fully, and reflects their care plan and agreed objectives for the placement. Young people are supported to state their views on the care they receive.

Young people are well supported to maintain positive contact with families and loved ones, and families say that they are made to feel welcome by staff at the centre. Opportunities are available for positive contact to be undertaken by young people with their families.

The centre seeks to ensure that each young person's placement is a positive experience for them from which they will benefit. Young people are treated sensitively and in accordance with agreed plans at admission, and there are very good information packs about the centre available in a range of formats. This ensures that young people who may have a learning difficulty or for whom English may be a second language are not disadvantaged.

Care planning for young people is good. All plans include appropriate arrangements for a safe and appropriate discharge back into the community, and a varied choice of training and vocational opportunities is available to young people to support this.

The views and opinions of young people about the way they are treated are valued and form an integral part of future planning. There is a good range of opportunities made available to them through different mechanisms to share their views, participate in decision making in their own lives and have a say in the way the centre is run. No young person is assumed to be unable to communicate their views.

Young people speak positively about their relationships with the staff team, and enjoy sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect.

As part of its regime, the centre offers a high level of support to young people individually and in groups to enable them to address offending and other behaviours which may have got them into trouble in the community and to enable them to cope more successfully when they return to the community.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Work to prepare young people for a more independent lifestyle commences quickly after admission. A variety of programmes covering preparation for discharge and resettlement along with developing life skills are available. They include life skills workbooks, which concentrate on practical skills and the creation of specific resettlement plans. These plans, which are known to young people, are monitored by senior staff regularly. Young people are supported to prepare for leaving the centre and their transition to the community and positive use is made of mobility programmes. Staff at the centre will represent young people should appropriate discharge plans not be in place from placing authorities, as well as encouraging them to access advocacy services.

Young people have no concerns about the systems in place to provide clothing, personal requisites or pocket money. They confirm they are able to make genuine choices, often by use of the internet, with staff making every effort to obtain the chosen items. Appropriate records are in place which show young people are able to monitor and manage their own budgets.

The centre's premises present as domestic in feel and quality rather than institutional. The arrangements for initiating repairs, upgrading décor and providing appropriate fixtures and fittings are generally good. When redecoration of living areas and bedrooms occurs, young people are able to have input into colour schemes. The living accommodation shows its age and looks tired with signs of wear and tear. There is a need to upgrade and refurbish many areas of the centre to ensure it facilitates the provision of the best standard of care.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A statement of purpose is available which clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the centre. Information is available within the statement which describes accurately how care is provided. Information is provided for young people in a wide range of formats. There are written and cartoon style booklets which are accompanied by DVDs reinforcing the information contained. The information presented in this way means that the basic day to day running of the centre can be understood by young people regardless of any learning difficulty.

The centre has recently changed the senior and middle management structure. This has resulted in specific roles and responsibilities being allocated covering programming, safeguarding and day to day operational matters. The structure is in its infancy and whilst there are still some areas of demarcation that need to be resolved, there is a discernable increase in the availability of senior staff offering support to staff carrying out work at the centre. Whilst there is no negative impact on the young people, further clarification of the roles and responsibilities of the management team is required to ensure there is no duplication of work carried out.

Informal support for staff at the centre is good, an experienced senior staff team are available to offer guidance and advice. A formal staff supervision structure is in place and sessions undertaken with individual staff are recorded. The completion of formal supervision for all staff members remains inconsistent. This has been identified by management information systems and measures put in place to increase the frequency. Whilst this shortfall does not have a direct impact on the quality of care received by the young people and support from staff for young people is effective, development opportunities for staff can on occasion go unidentified.

The staff team makeup consists of a good balance of age, gender and experience and some cultural diversity. The present reduction in numbers of young people who are provided with accommodation has enabled the management team to temporarily close one of the house units to allow some redecoration and maintenance work to be carried out. Staff members from the temporarily closed house unit are available to work and support the staffing contingency in other house units. Sufficient numbers of staff are on duty with relevant training to meet the needs of young people. There is a bank of relief staff available to support the centre when required, agency staff are not used.

There is a good range of training available to staff members which assists them to carry out their work with young people. Over 70% of staff have achieved an NVQ qualification in caring for children and young people. Each staff member has their training needs identified and there is an option for them to apply for funding for courses which interest them and may be beneficial to the work carried out. A training officer oversees all development and there is a training plan available. All of the above assists staff to work effectively with young people.

Regulation 33 visits are undertaken on a monthly basis by an officer of the local authority and a councillor who is a member of the authority's Corporate Parenting Panel. A report is produced following each visit and any recommendations are fed back to the manager. A follow up on any action taken as a result of recommendations made is undertaken at the next visit. The reports produced following a visit are comprehensive and include comments on conversations with young people and staff, the viewing of records and meals taken.

There is a comprehensive quality monitoring system in place and management use the information to improve outcomes for young people. Where shortfalls are identified senior management meetings are held to identify where developments can be made. A monthly report is compiled of all findings and this is used to identify areas requiring attention. Areas monitored include safeguarding, case management and workforce performance. A range of meetings are held on a weekly and monthly basis to review the care available and identify any adaptations required to ensure young people's needs are met.

All required records are held by the centre staff and management. There are individual records held for all young people which detail their development. Within the constraints of the nature of the service provided, practices are in place to ensure young people's welfare and safety are consistently addressed.

The promotion of equality and diversity within the welfare discipline is good. The individual needs of all young people are assessed and identified and plans are put in place to meet these. There are some good themed sessions carried out which help young people to understand differences in cultures. Young people are encouraged to celebrate their culture or religious beliefs.

Within the educational curriculum the promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The curriculum, including enrichment activities, helps young people to develop a wider understanding of social and cultural issues. Mixed groups of young people challenge gender stereotypes effectively.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
28	ensure that all staff receive formal supervision as described in the National Minimum Standards for children's homes (Regulation 27)	29/05/2009

Recommendations

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

- develop links with external organisations to share good practice and promote a broader and more outward perspective (Education NMS 14)
- develop quality improvement initiatives (Education NMS 14)
- develop the management information system to inform decision making and action planning (Education NMS 14)
- upgrade and refurbish the living areas at the centre to ensure they facilitate the provision of the best standard of care (NMS 24, LS2.1)
- ensure clarification of roles for all senior staff under the new management structure. (NMS 34)