

Inspection report for Children's Home

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Inspector	Malcolm Stannard / Graham Robinson
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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 Secure Services is managed by Durham County Council. 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 and approved by the Secretary of State to provide 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.

The establishment has a contract with the Youth Justice Board (YJB) to provide thirty five placements. Accommodation is provided to young people for whom the period of restricted liberty has been deemed necessary by a court.

There are four main admission routes to the unit: Young people remanded into secure care by a criminal court, young people convicted of offences and serving the custodial element of any Detention and Training Order (DTOs), young people convicted under Section 90 and 92 of the Powers of the Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 and young people subject to Section 25 of the Children Act 1989, who are a risk to themselves or others.

Aycliffe Secure Services 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 thirty six 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 unannounced inspection, the purpose of which is to assess progress against actions and recommendations which were made at the last inspection.

The management team have made good progress in meeting many of the actions and recommendations identified. Some actions and recommendations remain and are carried forward. No new requirements have been made. The formal educational provision at the home is not inspected on this occasion and recommendations made

previously in relation to education provision will be addressed at the next education inspection.

Strengths of the home include the quality assurance and auditing of the work carried out and the increase in life skills and vocational training available. A weakness of the home is the continued inconsistency of formal staff supervision.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection there were four actions identified, which the management of the home were required to carry out and a number of recommendations, which they were asked to consider.

A requirement was made that staff members working on Royston unit were able to supervise young people safely in the bedrooms. Work has been carried out to increase the ability of staff members to monitor the well-being of young people.

Concern was expressed at the last inspection that personal alarms for staff were not consistently reliable. Action has been taken to improve this situation, including a range of tests and audits.

A recommendation was made previously that work being carried out to provide CCTV cameras in bedroom corridors continued.

Funding by the DCSF had been agreed for cameras to be fitted in bedroom corridors but work had not commenced at the last inspection. This work has now been completed. A protocol is in place which promotes young people's privacy and dignity but enables staff to observe movements in the corridor if necessary. This supports staff and young people.

A further recommendation relating to critical incident forms used at the home was made. A form had been implemented in the home but was not consistently used by all the residential units. A standard form is now in use throughout the provision.

The complaints process for young people previously in operation did not enable them to make a complaint confidentially without staffs' knowledge. Improvements have now been effected to make it easier for young people to raise concerns directly.

A review of life skills work has been undertaken following a previous recommendation. The programme of available vocational subjects has been extended and the provision of newly created areas allows a number of life skills work to be completed.

It was recommended that young people were able to be fully consulted in relation to the provision of food at the home. Young people are now consulted on a daily basis, enabling them to make choices of meals they wish to eat.

Resources which were previously available for carrying out quality assurance work at the home were recommended to be increased. Some further administration support

for this task has been made available.

Some of the information contained in the home's statement of purpose and admission pack was previously found to be out of date and it was recommended that this was reviewed. Information contained in these publications has been updated and is now correct.

Actions and recommendations which were made at the last inspection and have not been met, relate to areas which include staff supervision, daily recording and the availability of alternative information for young people with limited literacy or communication skills.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

It was noted at the previous inspection that young people were not fully consulted in regard to the food provision at the home, meaning their opportunity to make choices was limited. A sheet is now completed at the beginning or end of each day on which options can be indicated. Young people confirm that they are now able to make choices on a daily basis.

There are choices available at meal times and some of these encourage healthy eating. These healthy options are preferred by many of the young people.

Attitudes of young people and staff regarding the organisation, delivery and quality of food ranges remain indifferent. The catering tender at the home has recently been awarded to a new company and revised working practices are being devised for implementation.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Work has been completed in Royston unit to address the issue of supervision when young people are in their bedrooms. Vision panels in bedroom doors have been widened and enable staff to carry out full visual checks of the area. This enables staff members to monitor the well-being of young people and ensures that their safety is adequately promoted.

There have been previous occasions when personal alarms at the home have been found to be unreliable in their use. Action has been taken to improve the situation. All personal alarms are now tested before being issued, in sight of the member of staff receiving it. The alarms are also checked on a monthly basis by an external contractor. An audit has been undertaken by the home to highlight any on-going difficulties and the findings are being used to inform future planning. The home continues to have a combination 'back up' system in the form of radios, telephones

and pagers. The measures taken by the home support staff and enable them to carry out their role with confidence.

Work to provide cameras in bedroom corridors has now been completed. A protocol has been implemented which promotes young people's privacy and dignity but enables staff to observe movements in the corridor if necessary. This supports staff and young people's safety.

A Critical Incident form has previously been implemented in the home but was not used consistently. The standard form has been revised to include a section about notification to relevant authorities and is now operational throughout the home. This ensures consistency in recording and facilitates monitoring of young people's safety and well-being.

The complaints process for young people previously did not enable them to make a complaint confidentially without staffs' knowledge. Improvements have now been effected to make it easier for young people to raise concerns directly with senior staff members, should they wish to do so. A 'letter box' has been fitted in the central courtyard which young people can access on a daily basis enabling them to post messages for senior management. This ensures young people's right to make a complaint in confidence is facilitated.

Young people know that they are able to access information held in relation to them, the information is held in a confidential manner and staff are aware of when and with whom any information can be shared.

Young people can access a telephone which is situated within a separate room on each unit enabling calls to be made in private. Independent advocates visit the home and young people are able to meet with them to express any concerns or views. Any physical care of young people required is carried out in a sensitive manner and an appropriate gender mix of staff allows young people a choice as to whom carries out this care for them.

Procedures and policies are in place in relation to safeguarding of young people. Staff are appropriately trained and any concerns raised by young people are dealt with in line with procedures. Stringent recording is undertaken in relation to any concerns raised and a positive working relationship is maintained with the local safeguarding children board.

Individual risk assessments are carried out on each young person enabling any risks of harm to be identified.

Referrals made following a concern been made are dealt with appropriately and comprehensive records are held.

The actions taken by staff at the home contributes to the welfare of young people been promoted.

Any bullying which may occur is seen as unacceptable. There are policies and procedures available for staff to follow and individual plans can be drawn up following any instance of bullying occurring. Workbooks to address issues are available for staff members to work through with young people. Appropriate records

are held of any work undertaken. This work helps to make sure that young people are protected from and educated about all aspects of bullying.

Whilst the home is a secure environment, there are procedures and policies available for staff members to follow should any young person be absent from the home without authority. These include the use of an independent person to speak with a young person following any absence.

The home operates a points based incentive scheme for young people. Young people understand the system and how it works. There are a wide range of rewards available for each level of attainment. Young people are also able to have input into the scheme via discussions held during meetings and with individual key workers.

Any sanctions used for inappropriate behaviour are in line with those which are permissible and tend to be tied into the incentive scheme. All sanctions are recorded and young people are invited to make their own comments in the record. Auditing of entries is carried out by senior management and quality assurance staff.

Any visitors to the home are appropriately vetted and are accompanied when within the secure area or in the presence of young people. There is a comprehensive staff recruitment procedure carried out which includes a range of appropriate checks and formal/informal interviews. Records are held of all checks completed and are audited by senior management prior to any commencement of employment. The systems used help to ensure that young people are protected and looked after by staff members who are suitable to carry out the tasks required.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

At the previous inspection, a recommendation to consider alternative ways of advising young people admitted with limited literacy and communication skills about the home was made.

A DVD which is intended to inform young people about the home remains unfinished.

A new guide for young people has been produced and this covers all areas of information about the way the home operates. However, it relies mainly on the written word to communicate its information and is not suitable for those who may have difficulty reading text. Whilst symbols used in the guide give an indication of the subject matter of each section, they do not provide a full explanation of rules or procedures followed.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

A review of life skills work and training towards independent living for young people has taken place following a previous recommendation. This is reflected in three areas of development.

Staff with specific skills have been identified to deliver AQA units for young people. A total of 15 units, all designed to educate and promote self awareness are in place and ready to be implemented.

The programme promoting vocational life skills has been extended as result of the completion of various building programmes around the campus, including the extension of the secure perimeter. For example, horticulture makes use of a new poly-tunnel and a new studio to develop hair and beauty skills has been created.

Young people also have the opportunity to enlist on activities such as art, music and motorbikes designed to enhance personal development. They speak positively about all of these developments. This increase in provision enables more young people to experience a wider range of learning experiences.

Three new posts known as integrated intervention coordinators have been created and staff appointed to these. It is proposed by management that these staff will aid young people to undertake more tailored independence programmes based on individual need.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There has been an increase in resources available to the staff member who carries out quality assurance work at the home. Administration and data entry support is available from the information services team. Further funding has been made available for additional support services to carry out further work in relation to the quality and development of practice at the home.

A system is in place to enable a record to be held when information is missing from young peoples individual files. Staff members are able to note the date when the information is requested. File audits are carried out which identify when these requests need to be addressed at a higher level.

The statement of purpose for the home has recently been updated ensuring information given is current and correct. Amendments have been made to the young person's guide to include information regarding the new opportunities for vocational activities and enrichment.

Comprehensive auditing of formal staff supervision is undertaken. The amount of sessions completed is inconsistent between the individual house units and does not meet the requirement of the relevant regulation. Two of the four houses have shown an improvement in the quantity of supervision undertaken. Management at the home continue to meet with senior staff to identify any issues and how they may be negated.

Where supervision does not occur this lessens the support available to staff members.

Daily logs are held in each of the individual houses which record events such as phone calls and visitors relating to young people. There is an inconsistency in how this information is entered and in some entries young peoples full names and information which is confidential to them is included. On occasion the logs contain a full account of occurrences rather than signposting to the record where the information is held. This means that confidentiality could be compromised as well as duplication of recording by staff occurring.

Each young person has an individual record held of their needs and development whilst at the home. Case file audit sheets are in place on each of these files and enable audits to be recorded and identification of any missing information to be made. Appropriate file audit sheets are available for the differing types of files which are held in the home. The provision of file audit records ensures that any missing information can be identified and requested.

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)	16/12/2008
35	maintain the daily log to reflect events of the day, whilst avoiding the inclusion of confidential information relating to young people (Regulation 28.2)	16/12/2008

Recommendations

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

- consider alternative means of advising young people being admitted who may have limited literary or communication skills about the expectations of Aycliffe (NMS 5)
- ensure that the senior staffing structure for education is agreed and implemented as a matter of urgency (NMS 14)
- review and evaluate the roles and responsibilities of the teaching and learning assistants to ensure that they are used effectively to support learning (NMS 14)
- review and evaluate the timetable in consultation with all education staff to make best use of the new accommodation; to create stability in teaching groups; to reduce the movement of young people between lessons; to integrate the curriculum for young people with special education needs; and to take account of planned developments in vocational provision (NMS 14).