

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Lynda Mosling
Type of Inspection	Key

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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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 is a registered children's home for up to eight young people between the ages of 12 and 17 years. The home is owned by the local City Council. It is a purpose built, two storey building that opened in August 2001. The accommodation is spacious, well maintained and provides appropriate accommodation for the young people living there. The home is located in its own grounds with parking at the front and an enclosed garden at the back. The home is in a busy residential area and there is easy access by public transport to the city.

Summary

This unannounced inspection assesses the key National Minimum Standards for children's homes. Young people were given the opportunity to contribute to the inspection through survey, telephone and e-mail as only one young person was present on the day of inspection.

The home provides good care to young people who require emergency and short to medium term placements. Young people have their needs assessed by a competent and confident staff group who have the skills to build good relationships with challenging young people. The strengths include good records, reflective practice and a well trained staff group. A weakness identified was the recording of the views of parents and young people.

Young people are helped to keep themselves safe and to understand the risks involved in some of their chosen behaviour. There are good systems to ensure their physical and emotional health needs are met.

The accommodation is well maintained and provides areas for privacy as well as communal living, although the atmosphere is not particularly homely.

Staff training is good and there is open communication between staff and the placing social workers.

Young people indicate that they feel well cared for in the home.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last key inspection there was one recommendation relating to preparing young people for independence. The home has worked with other agencies and teams to ensure the plans and arrangements for young people moving into independence prepares them in a practical and more systematic way.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy healthy, balanced food that takes their preferences into account. There is choice at all meals and menus show that there is a varied diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Young people are able to get involved in shopping and cooking, although most

only choose to do so as part of an independence preparation programme. Responses to the young people's surveys confirmed that they are happy with the food choices and are well fed.

The health needs of each young person are assessed by a specialist nurse. The assessments are thorough and identify the action needed to keep young people healthy. The staff support young people at appointments and meetings regarding their health, if this is what the young person chooses. Appropriate action is taken in the event of accidents and incidents to ensure any medical treatment is speedily delivered. Each young person has a health plan as part of the placement plan. The manager and staff are proactive in setting up further health assessments where necessary. They work well with colleagues from the health services in order to understand young people's needs and provide for them appropriately. This includes investigating any cultural or spiritual needs and resources. Young people confirm that they feel well looked after by the staff.

The medication administration arrangements in the home are good. The medication is kept in an appropriately locked cupboard and the records of administration of medication are accurate and up to date. Staff have received training in medication administration and are aware of the health needs of each young person. First aid training is regularly updated and all activities are risk assessed to highlight the action needed to minimise risk to young people's health and safety.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The staff respect young people's privacy by knocking on doors before entering and keeping all personal information confidential. Room searches are infrequent and are only undertaken according to agreed procedures. There are quiet areas where young people can entertain their friends and a telephone is well sited to enable private calls. Separate bathrooms for males and females are provided close to the bedrooms to ensure young people have privacy.

The complaints procedure is known and well used by the young people. Staff ensure young people are aware of their rights and encourage them to take up formal complaints where they remain unhappy with the action taken. Records show that these are dealt with appropriately by the council, including recourse to independent investigators. The staff are careful to write accurate records of any incidents or sanctions given and give young people the opportunity to comment on what is written. This helps young people feel they are listened to and their concerns taken seriously. Young people challenge staff on an ongoing basis. Many have a great deal of experience of being cared for by the council and are able to air their views forcefully.

The local procedures for safeguarding children are thorough and training is provided to all staff. Records show that appropriate referrals are made to the safeguarding teams when there is an issue of concern. Young people at the home sometimes choose to put themselves at risk by their behaviour. The staff do all they can to discourage this and ensure the young person is aware of the dangers. Good communication with the local police helps protect young people from some of the risks, but staff are often frustrated at the choices they continue to make. Where young people's safety has been threatened the staff take appropriate action to report the offender and support the young person. Feedback from young people confirm that the staff try to help them to keep safe.

There is a good anti-bullying policy and risk assessments highlight any known problems. Staff actively discourage bullying and remove rewards from young people who are seen to behave in a bullying manner. The staff have a well developed understanding of the effects of bullying and of the subtle manipulation some young people employ to control others. Key worker sessions and individual counselling are used to try and minimise this behaviour.

The threshold for reporting unauthorised absences and missing persons is clearly stated and is followed by all staff. Some of the young people currently in placement often do not come home at the agreed time, choosing to stay with friends. Staff report this appropriately and try to ensure they keep the lines of communication open with the young people so they can check their safety. In most cases the young people return within a day and are welcomed back by the staff. The reasons for them going missing are always investigated but most incidents are explained as the desire to be with friends. The staff collectively look at strategies to reduce these incidents and ensure young people know that they are concerned about them whilst they are missing.

The home uses a rewards system where points are given for a range of behaviours, including settling well at night, going to school and not getting involved in other young people's disruptive behaviour. The rewards can be exchanged for extra pocket money or treats. Young people know the system well and can use it to their advantage. It has proved effective in changing some behaviours. Sanctions for anti-social behaviour include loss of television time and the need to be accompanied by staff when spending pocket money. Young people's views about the sanctions given are included in the records. These are monitored by the manager and challenged if felt to be inappropriate. Staff were observed to reflect on the way they manage young people's behaviour and to discuss individual strategies to maximise improvements.

There are good systems to ensure the safety of young people in the home. These include regular testing of fire alarms and equipment, unannounced fire drills, checking visitors identity and surveillance of the grounds. Maintenance is good with all repairs being dealt with promptly.

The council has a safe recruitment process managed centrally. This ensures correct checks are made prior to any staff member starting work with young people. The personnel records are held at the central office and have been inspected by a colleague who judges the system as good.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The home is good at assessing individual need and recording how these needs are being met. Young people are respected as individuals and their preferences are considered in the running of the home. Each care plan identifies the work needed with the young people and who will undertake the work. The home provides short term care and therefore cares for a continually changing group of young people. Staff are good at building relationships with young people and quickly identify individual goals and aspirations. Staff support the young people to reach these as far as possible.

Education is promoted by the home and all of the young people in placement have an identified school provision. Staff do all they can to ensure the young people attend by providing transport, the correct clothing and rewarding attendance. Additional support from specialist agencies in

the city is provided to young people refusing school to ensure that they are engaged in some educational activity. All young people have a personal education plan but some do not see education as a priority and have little interest in educational achievement.

The home provides a range of activities both inside the home and in the form of trips and visits to places of interest. Staff clearly enjoy time with the young people and try to engage them in games and sports. Most of the young people are more motivated by their friends and activities outside of the home and choose to spend their free time elsewhere. Staff continue to encourage and support both group and individual activities. There is a good supply of books and games available for young people to enjoy.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The home provides one of the main placement options for young people in the city who need to be cared for in an emergency, and sometimes has to care for young people without the benefit of a full assessment. The staff are skilled at gathering available information quickly and at assessing the immediate needs of the young person. Where the placement has been planned there is good assessment material available and the manager has the opportunity to consider how the placement will affect the other young people in the home. In reality the lack of resources often provides young people with little choice of placement, although those currently placed have indicated their satisfaction with the placement.

Staff attend the Looked After Children reviews and have frequent discussions with the young people's social workers. All reviews are well documented and detail the progress made by the young people. Although staff spend a great deal of time discussing young people and considering their placements they feel the management systems do not always make good use of their views.

Contact with family and friends is agreed following the initial assessment. Young people are encouraged and supported to maintain contact with their family unless this is detrimental to their welfare. Staff provide support to parents during the visits home and are often involved in transporting the young people to and from contact. Staff are very aware of the importance of maintaining good relationships with significant people in the young people's lives and understand how easily young people can be upset by these being disrupted.

Young people are welcomed to the home sensitively, although in many cases there is not enough notice to arrange a planned introduction. Welcome packs are provided that give the young people a good picture of how the home runs and includes useful advice and contact numbers. A key worker and co-worker are allocated and take responsibility for helping the young person settle in. The young people have their own rooms and are encouraged to personalise them with their own possessions. When young people leave the home it is well planned and staff are able to offer ongoing support on an outreach basis to ensure young people continue to feel supported by people they have become close to. This demonstrates a continuity of care that benefits the young people and helps raise their self esteem. Previous residents often return to visit the staff to share their progress and show appreciation of the care they received whilst at the home.

Whilst some of the views expressed by young people are seen on the files the views of parents and people significant to them are not routinely recorded. It is therefore difficult to judge how well the home seeks and uses the opinions of others in their care of young people. Meetings

of young people are held on a regular basis and are minuted. These provide an opportunity for young people to have their say and to put forward their ideas. Agenda items have included food and activities as well as rules and sanctions. An independent advocate is involved in the young people's meetings to encourage and support open expression of views.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people moving into independence are involved in a pathway plan and usually have access to a period of training to manage alone before moving out. This period is well supported by a range of agencies. The home aims to provide young people with experiences that will prepare them for adulthood such as using public transport and managing their money. The current group of young people choose to have little involvement in shopping and cooking, but staff confirm that previous residents have done so effectively. There have been improvements in working together with other teams to assist the planning for young people to move on.

The home is modern and purpose built and sits in its own grounds. It is close to main roads into the city and therefore very accessible. There is safe parking and an enclosed garden to the rear that is well used by the young people for outside activities. The furnishings are of high standard and the home is well maintained. The home does not feel immediately homely as the walls are bare and there is little evidence that young people contribute to the decoration within the home. The home has private and communal areas and enough bathroom facilities for the numbers of young people cared for.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The home is very young person orientated and is good at assessing and meeting individual needs. Staff are very keen to promote individuality and will support young people to follow their own goals. Clothing, food and activities are provided taking the young people's preferences into account. The staff are careful to ensure they challenge any discriminatory behaviour and encourage young people to appreciate each other's differences. The home celebrates a range of special occasions and dates including those of other cultures. The staff say they have learnt a lot from caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the past and were successful in providing special food, support within the community, and help to ensure young people could communicate their views.

The Statement of Purpose has been updated and accurately reflects the service on offer. There is additionally a children's guide and welcome pack setting out information about the home and what to expect. The Statement of Purpose is available to placing social workers and parents and covers all of required areas. The manager ensures it is reviewed regularly and that the practice is consistent with the aims of the service.

The staff have many years combined service of caring for young people in residential care. Over 90% of staff are qualified to National Vocational Qualification Level 3, or higher, in Child Care and are confident and competent carers. They are reflective in their practice and are encouraged to challenge each other. This helps develop consistency in dealing with young people's behaviour. Roles and responsibilities are well known and the shifts are organised effectively. Staff rotas include a hand over of one staff team to another and these were observed to share useful information about the progress and needs of each young person. Accountability lines are well

known and there is always a senior staff member on each shift. The manager is generally additional to the staff on duty. Recent changes in the senior staffing arrangements have resulted in some lessening of staff morale but this is well understood and is being managed within supervision. Staff are fully aware of how to raise concerns and confirm that they would do so at any time the welfare of young people is threatened.

There are adequate staff to meet the needs of the young people in placement and the manager is responsive to the changing needs of the group. The home currently employs waking night and sleep-in staff to ensure the welfare of young people throughout the day and night. The staff team work well together and demonstrate trust and respect for each other.

The council provides a good range of training opportunities to its staff and ensures the basic necessary training, such as child protection, is refreshed regularly. Staff are supported to develop their knowledge and skills on a continual basis and can request specialist training if it is work related. Staff demonstrate a sound understanding of child development and attachment theory. The gender balance amongst staff is good and there is careful consideration of the best way of using individual strengths to promote the optimum care to young people.

The council has a well developed monitoring process, including unannounced Regulation 33 visits. The reports provided are thorough and pick up any issues of concern. They include measurement against standards and regulations. Any gaps in the delivery of service are followed up at the next visit. The senior management systems, including the children's placement panel, ensures the home works to its stated aims and objectives. Inspection reports are available to all staff and interested parties and the home has a good record of response to any recommendations made.

The home holds a confidential file and a working file on each young person in the home. The confidential file has all the background information, assessments and care plans to ensure appropriate care is given to the young person. The working file contains daily records, appointments and recent correspondence. The files are thorough and easy to read and provide a good picture of each young person and their needs. There is evidence of them being updated by the key worker on a regular basis. There is additional information held by the young person's case holder and information is shared via discussion and computer systems.

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

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure significant views, discussions and expressed opinions are recorded promptly, particularly with regard to parents of the young people in the home (NMS 8.3 & 8.6)

- ensure the home is decorated and furnished to create a pleasant domestic environment appropriate for the young people being accommodated. (NMS 24.2)