

## Inspection report for children's home

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC037762        |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 22/04/2013      |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | David Coulter   |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Full            |
| <b>Provision subtype</b>       | Children's home |

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| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 18/12/2012 |
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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This is a local authority, purpose-built children's home that operates as a reception and assessment centre. The home is registered to accommodate seven young people of either gender between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

### 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 **adequate**.

Due to an increase in demand for residential placements for a particularly vulnerable group of older teenagers, the home has, since the last inspection, experienced great difficulty in fulfilling its primary objective as a short term assessment unit. Although staff are clearly focused on providing positive outcomes for young people, they are finding it particularly difficult in breaking established patterns of risk taking behaviours. While staff are successful in keeping young people safe in and around the home, they are experiencing great difficulty in positively influencing the often anti-social activities of young people when they are in the local community. However, the home's staff are extremely resourceful and are continually exploring new ways of engaging with young people to develop more effective strategies to keep them safe.

Young people spoken with during the inspection spoke in generally positive terms about their lives within the home and special mention was made of the support provided by staff, the quality and quantity of food. All were appreciative of having their own rooms. Although young people are encouraged to pursue full and active lives by participating in educational and recreational activities, not all the current residents are regularly accessing the opportunities being provided.

There is one recommendation arising from this inspection. The recommendation relates to the home's current Statement of Purpose which requires changing to better reflect the nature of the care presently being offered.

## Areas for improvement

## Recommendations

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

- review the home's Statement of Purpose to ensure it reflects the service currently being offered. (NMS 13)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Outcomes for young people are variable. Although evidence indicates that most are making significant progress in many areas of their lives and are benefiting from the safety and stability the home provides, many are still spending considerable periods of time within their established social networks and as a consequence are putting themselves at risk. Recent arrests indicate that a number are still engaging in criminal behaviour that, if it continues, will inevitably lead to custodial sentences. While staff have been successful in establishing relationships with the current residents their success in breaking self-destructive patterns of behaviour have, so far, been limited.

The majority of young people have been admitted following placement breakdowns. In a number of instances, young people have arrived following unsuccessful stays in semi-independent living schemes. The age profile of the home's residents has continued to rise and a number are now approaching their 18th birthdays. The aim for the majority of young people is to move on to independent or semi-independent placements. However, placements that can offer enough specialist support are extremely limited and as a consequence many young people are residing longer in the home than they expected.

Young people are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles by eating wisely and taking regular exercise. Young people are provided with a varied and nutritionally balanced diet which incorporates personal tastes and cultural requirements. For example, arrangements were put in place to ensure that the young people observing Ramadan could access food both before and after sunset. Young people can access drinks and snacks in between meals. Young people generally spoke in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food on offer. As one young person commented, 'the food is fine, if you do not like what is on offer you are always provided with an alternative.' While the current residents participation in recreational activities is sporadic, those spoken with confirmed that they often preferred to walk rather than access public transport.

All the current residents appear to benefit from good health and none are in receipt of regular medication. While staff monitor the health and well-being of each young person on an on-going basis there is an expectation, that due to their age, young people will begin to assume responsibility for monitoring their own health. Staff are proactive in identifying and addressing health issues with individuals and for example

those with established smoking habits are encouraged to access programmes to help them give up. Although young people are made aware of the health consequences associated with illicit substances staff reported that a number are regularly using cannabis.

Staff promote the importance of education and are proactive in supporting young people access and maintain educational placements. Although young people are made aware of the importance of maintaining regular attendance and of completing courses, there has been reluctance on the part of a number to take advantage of the opportunities provided for them. As the intention is for many of the current residents to move on to independent living placements, opportunities are provided for them to extend their knowledge and skills by participating in independence training exercises.

When appropriate, young people are helped to maintain contact with members of their families and staff will, if required assist with contact visits. In an effort to enable young people make successful transitions to greater independence, staff will continue to support them until they are settled in their new placements. Support and contact is also maintained with young people who are undertaking custodial sentences. In many instances this is the only outside contact such young people receive. Staff reported that such interest and support is greatly appreciated.

## **Quality of care**

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

Staff within the home are particularly skilled in assessing the physical, social and cultural needs of each young person entering their care. The home's effective key-worker system ensures each young person has a well-informed advocate who will support them and represent their views. Staff are extremely successful in helping young people settle and achieve short-term goals, such as maintaining existing educational placements. However, meeting longer term goals, such as moving on to semi-independent living placements, is clearly more difficult and dependent on the availability of resources over which they have no control.

The views of young people are sought on all aspects of their lives and are encouraged to assert their independence within the home by exercising choice over such things as the decoration of their rooms, food and participation in recreational and leisure activities. On admission all young people are made aware of how to raise concerns and make a complaint. No complaints have been made since the last inspection. The cultural and religious needs of each individual are identified and positively addressed.

Staff have created a safe and nurturing environment in which young people are expected to respect each other and peacefully co-exist. There is a zero tolerance of any form of bullying or discriminatory behaviour and staff will intervene if they feel a young person is being picked on. By using praise and encouragement to reinforce positive behaviour, staff help each young person increase their confidence and develop a more positive self-image. The dynamics within the resident group are

carefully monitored and young people will be moved if there is obvious incompatibility. Staff aim to ensure that each young person is aware of the possible consequences associated with their behaviours. Although sanctions are used for serious misdemeanours, their effectiveness appears to have a limited impact on changing established patterns of often self-destructive behaviours such as accessing illicit substances. Staff de-escalate challenging behaviours by the deployment of a range of tried and tested diversionary techniques and physical interventions are only ever used if it is believed is putting themselves or others at serious risk.

The home was found to be structurally sound and in good decorative order. It is subject to regular maintenance and any damage receives immediate attention. Staff are continuously looking at ways to improve the environment and a new purpose built kitchen has been installed since the last inspection. Communal areas are bright and comfortably furnished. The home has a designated games room and enclosed garden area for recreational activities. The home is within walking distance of a wide range of recreational and sporting facilities. Young people spoke in positive terms about their accommodation and were appreciative of the fact they had their own bedrooms. Young people reported that their privacy is respected and that staff always knock their doors before entering.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

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

Staff are clearly aware of the vulnerabilities of each young person in their care and use risk assessments to identify areas of particular concern associated with their behaviour or level of understanding. Most of the risks associated with the current residents relates to their safety while in the company of their friends and associates in the local community. Staff try and get young people to adopt practices to keep themselves safe when they are out and about. They encourage young people to maintain contact via their mobile phones and will arrange for transport if they find themselves stranded. Staff liaise with a range of agencies to keep young people safe and have recently worked with police in the development of more effective procedures for young people who go missing. Although staff are proactive in determining where young people go, what they are doing and with whom they are associating they are unable to prevent a number from engaging in criminal activities.

Staff aim to ensure young people are protected from contact with inappropriate adults. Access to the home is limited and all visitors have to report to staff and sign in before being admitted. The home does not employ volunteers and young people are cared for by an experienced and well qualified team of staff all of whom have been appropriately vetted. Staffing levels are appropriate and are responsive to changing demands and circumstances. If additional staff are required they are drawn from the local authority's staff bank. Members of the staff team have worked with vulnerable young people for many years and have developed working practices that are underpinned by sound safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff spoken with were clearly aware of the particular risks and vulnerabilities associated with each of

the current residents and were able to identify the strategies staff are employing to keep each of them safe in both in the home and local community.

Regular health and safety checks ensure the building and grounds provide a safe environment that remains free of any unnecessary hazards. All vehicles are regularly checked and are only driven by staff who have demonstrated their competence. The fire alarm system is tested weekly and regular fire evacuations ensure staff and young people remain conversant with procedures.

## **Leadership and management**

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

The home has experienced a significant number of changes since the last key inspection. The new Hub management system is now bedding down and there is now much more alignment between policies and procedures within the local authority's three residential homes. It is also clear that due to changing circumstances the home's primary function as a short term assessment centre has been compromised. Due to a lack of alternative placements, staff are now providing longer term care for an older group of vulnerable residents who require support and accommodation. Although staff are clearly aspirational about the young people in their care and focused on producing positive outcomes for them, their task is dependent on the willingness of young people to positively engage with them. Being older teenagers, many of the current residents spend large periods of time out and about in the local community and as a consequence the ability of staff to influence already established patterns of behaviours can be limited.

The experienced manager leads a well-motivated team of staff who have demonstrated a great degree of flexibility in developing working practices in response to the changing needs of the young people being referred. Monitoring processes are robust and include monthly visits by an independent reviewing officer. Staff reflect the progress each young person is making in their looked after children reviews. Confidential information relating to the care of young people is stored in appropriately secure facilities.

Morale within the staff team is good and staff are actively involved in the development of the service they provide. Staff feel well supported and regular supervision provides the opportunity to engage in reflective practice. Communication systems are effective and handover meetings between shifts ensure key information is shared among staff working on different shifts. Staffing levels are good and continuously monitored to ensure young people's needs can be appropriately met. There is a culture of training and professional development within the staff team and staff regularly access training opportunities.

## 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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.