

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Coulter
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

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. Although the home is registered to accommodate seven young people of either gender between the ages of 12 and 17 years, one place is kept for emergency placements. Young people undertake twelve week placements during which their specific physical, social and emotional, cultural, linguistic, educational and spiritual needs are assessed, and preparations made for either returning home or moving on to permanent foster or residential placements.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

As no young people have completed their assessments, it is not possible to measure the home's success against its stated aims and objectives. However, the new staff team have been successful in creating a safe and nurturing environment that provides much needed stability in the lives of young people, many of whom have faced trauma and rejection. Staff have proved extremely adept at establishing trusting relationships with young people within a short time span. Although the home's new remit is made clear in a new Statement of Purpose, a children's guide has yet to be developed and it is a requirement that one is produced.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
4 (2001)	provide a children's guide in an appropriate format. (Regulation 4 (3))	01/08/2011

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are healthy and none are in receipt of regular medication. The advice and support provided by staff in regard to health related issues is generally accepted. Regular health checks by doctors, dentists and opticians identify any needs that require addressing. Young people have healthy diets and positive comments were made about both the quality and quantity of food on offer. Although many of the current residents do not participate in sporting activities they all maintain a degree of fitness by regularly walking.

Although the home does not operate with an extensive list of rules there is a set of mutually agreed standards. During their placements young people are helped to develop a range of domestic skills and receive rewards for making positive contributions to the operation of the home. For example, young people are expected to take responsibility for their personal hygiene, keep their rooms tidy and, in some instances, acquire the ability to undertake their own laundry. One young person recognised the importance of acquiring a range of independent living skills and said that it would, 'help me later if I ever get my own flat'.

Every effort is made to ensure that young people's education is not disrupted as a consequence of their placements. Staff seek out and support educational placements. Young people are aware of the value of education and are all keen to make educational progress. Staff monitor the educational progress of each young person and liaise with school staff and attend planning meetings as required. Young people experiencing difficulties receive additional support from staff who will accompany them into the classroom. Educational success is recognised and young people receive rewards for attendance and progress. Young people without educational placements can access a range of educational resources during daily morning and afternoon educational sessions.

Young people can maintain contact with parents and friends during their placements and staff will provide transport to contact visits if required.

Quality of care

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

The care needs of each young person are identified on admission and a comprehensive care planning system provides guidance for staff on how they can be effectively met during their placement. Individual risk assessments are used to identify any areas of potential concern associated with a young person's behaviour. Staff closely monitor the progress of each young person and modify individual's care plans in response to changing needs. Although young people said they were aware of the likely duration and purpose of their placements, they were not provided with a young person's guide to the home. A written guide would provide them with a better understanding of the nature of the provision, the role of staff, the services and facilities available and their rights and obligations.

Given the time limitations of placements, staff need to establish positive relationships with young people within a short period of time. Every effort is made to make young people feel welcome and safe. Many of the young people are referred to the home following foster placement breakdowns. Link workers are carefully matched with young people with whom they can relate easily. Link workers work alongside young people to identify possible reasons and explore preventative measures that could be employed if similar circumstances arise in the future. Staff reinforce positive behaviours and help individual's address issues relating to a lack of confidence and poor self-image. Young people are encouraged to exercise self-control and are helped to understand the possible consequences of their often self-destructive behaviours. Sensitive issues relating to personal identity are only ever discussed if a young person has expressed a willingness to explore such areas.

The current residents have responded positively to this nurturing approach and are making significant progress in many aspects of their social and emotional development. Staff have clearly established effective relationships with the current residents and social interactions were observed to be both spontaneous and warm. Important information about each young person is shared by staff so that they can respond effectively to changing circumstance.

There is an expectation that young people will peacefully co-exist and tolerate others. Each young person is provided with their own lockable accommodation which is designated as 'their own personal space'. Staff reported privacy is normally respected. Disagreements are expected to be resolved through discussion. Staff confront discriminatory and bullying behaviour and young people are made aware of its influence on both individuals and communities. The views of young people are regularly sought about all aspects of their care, formally through young people's meetings and link workers sessions and informally through regular discussions with staff.

Young people are made aware of the local authority's complaints procedure on admission. Records indicate that a number of complaints have been registered by the same young person. A closer examination revealed that the majority concerned the normal irritations and niggles associated with communal living and could have been dealt with if they had, in the first instance, been reported to the staff on duty at the time. All complaints are taken seriously and are investigated.

Young people occupy a suitably appointed property that is accessible to a number of social amenities and public transport routes into the city centre. It is structurally sound and in extremely good decorative order. Muted colours, soft furnishings and numerous pictures help create a pleasant homely environment. Young people appreciated being able to personalise their rooms by introducing their own posters and pictures. The home's heating and hot water systems are effective. The property and its equipment are subject to regular health and safety checks and full fire evacuations are carried out at regular intervals.

During their placements young people access education, contribute to daily life within the home and participate in a diverse range of social and recreational activities in the local area. Young people are introduced to a range of social experiences during their placements and, for example, regular themed meals introduce individuals to the cuisine's of different cultures.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people live full and active lives and are kept safe by the application of a comprehensive risk assessment system and effective staff supervision. On admission the particular risks and vulnerabilities associated with each young person are identified and strategies developed to address them. Destructive patterns of behaviour, such as self-harming are handled sensitively. Staff are proactive in determining where young people go and inappropriate contacts discouraged. Young people keep staff informed of their daily movements and are expected to honour agreed return times.

Staff reinforce positive behaviour and recognise success with rewards. Sanctions are used sparingly and normally consist of a removal of privilege. Staff deploy diversionary techniques when confronted with incidents of challenging behaviour. Restraints are only ever used if a young person is putting themselves or others at risk. All restraints are recorded and the antecedents of each incident noted. There are very few incidents of restraint since the home has re-opened as an assessment facility.

Young people are safe and say that they feel safe in the home. There are good arrangements for the protection of young people. Staff are clear regarding the safeguarding policies and procedures and there are well established procedures for reporting anyone who has not returned at agreed times and those who do go missing are responded to positively on their return.

Recruitment processes are effective and detailed and all staff are subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check every three years.

Leadership and management

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

The home's remit has changed since the last key inspection and it is now operating as a reception and assessment centre. Young people undertake twelve week placements during which their physical, social, educational, emotional and cultural needs are assessed. The information obtained contributes to a core assessment that will help determine if a young person will return home or move onto a fostering or residential placement

A new staff team has been created to develop the homes new remit. The composition of the team was carefully selected and contains experienced and well-qualified childcare practitioners. Although staff have only worked together for a few months good working relationships have been established and the team is functioning effectively. Staff spoke positively about the progress young people are making in many areas of their lives including education.

A new manager has been appointed to manage the home since the last inspection. The new manager was previously the registered manager of one of the local authority's other homes and has many years of working with vulnerable young people in residential settings. He has managed, within a short period of time, to bring together a new staff team and develop a new service. The home's function as a reception and assessment centre is made clear in a new comprehensive Statement of Purpose.

The manager keeps abreast of all developments within the home and the progress of each young person. There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure management cover in his absence. The home is appropriately financed and benefits from generous staffing levels. Evidence indicates there are sufficient funds available to operate the home in the best interests of the young people currently accommodated.

The new staff team is functioning well and good quality care is being provided on a consistent basis. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have access to a comprehensive range of policies and procedures. Staff keep abreast of developments within the childcare field and regularly access training opportunities within the local authority. Communication systems are effective and information is shared via regular staff and hand-over meetings between shifts. All shifts are managed by experienced senior staff. Staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal. The home is subject to regular monitoring visits and copies of the reports were available in the home. Records and documents contain recent and relevant information and are stored in appropriately locked facilities. The action and recommendation arising from the last inspection have been met and the safeguarding of young people has been improved by the introduction of new fire risk assessments and procedures for recording restraints.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.

