

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspection date	1 December 2009
Inspector	Lynda Mosling
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	5 August 2008
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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

The children's home is located in a residential area with close access to local amenities, shops and public transport facilities. The home can accommodate five young people from the age of 12 to 17 who may have complex behavioural or emotional needs. It is owned by the local council and has recently undergone major refurbishment.

Summary

This unannounced inspection assesses the key national minimum standards for children's homes. Staff and young people contributed to the process. The inspection was undertaken by one inspector during a weekday.

The home has been operational since the completion of the refurbishment in April 2009 and currently accommodates four young people.

The home provides outstanding care to young people by a committed and experienced staff group who are well supported by the management arrangements.

The health and safety of young people is promoted by comprehensive assessment of need and clear action plans to meet those needs. Excellent systems are in place to involve other agencies in these plans to ensure a sharing of responsibility. Young people are helped to understand the risks of their behaviour and are encouraged to develop strategies to minimise these risks.

Other strengths include the promotion of education, recognition of individual strengths and a desire to make young people feel that they belong. Records are excellent at evidencing the work undertaken with young people.

Staff clearly enjoy the company of the young people and have relaxed and honest relationships with them while continually challenging anti-social behaviours. The home presents as calm and focused on young people's welfare. There is good evidence of its positive impact on young people's lives.

All of the outcome areas are judged as outstanding. One recommendation is made as a result of this inspection. This relates to a minor omission in record keeping.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the home since it became operational in April 2009.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people enjoy a wide range of food that takes their preferences and needs into consideration. They are very involved in the planning and preparation of meals and use this experience to further their independence skills. The kitchen is large and offers the opportunity for the preparation of the meal, as well as the eating of it, to be a social occasion. Young people

are extremely positive about the quality of food and the way their choices are included in the menu.

The individual health assessments are exceedingly comprehensive and include assessments from all specialists involved in the care of the young people. Records of appointments, changes in medication and newly identified needs are routinely kept. There is an excellent system to chart young people's progress and clear evidence that this has been successful in impacting on some personal health and hygiene issues. Young people are discouraged from smoking and alcohol and drug misuse with the support of specialist services.

Staff are trained in first aid, and records evidence that they react appropriately to accidents and incidents within the home. Medication is safely stored and records are meticulous. Staff are knowledgeable about the effects of any medication given and also help young people to understand these.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff respect young people's privacy by ensuring that they knock on doors before entering and by keeping their personal information safe. A telephone has been sited to enable young people to speak in private. There is enough quiet communal space to allow for undisturbed meetings with professionals, family and friends.

The complaints procedure is comprehensive and includes an independent element. Records show that this has been used effectively by the home. Young people confirm that they know the procedure and are encouraged by the staff to make complaints if they are unhappy about the way they are treated. They are very clear that they do not have any current complaints about their care.

Staff have undertaken child protection training at induction, and on an ongoing basis. Each young person has a staying safe plan with overall aims and objectives and which details the action necessary to keep them safe. Potential and actual risks are identified and considered. The systems in place to highlight these risks to other agencies are excellent and ensure that the responsibility for keeping young people safe is shared. This promotes confidence in the staff. It also enables them to deal effectively with young people who are considered at high risk of harm.

The anti-bullying policy is very thorough and identifies a large range of bullying behaviours and the effects of these on young people. Young people are made very aware of the expectation not to bully and restorative justice techniques are used to ensure that the result of bullying is understood by the perpetrator. Young people are continually encouraged to accept and respect others and to look at better ways of expressing any irritation they feel.

The missing persons process has been agreed corporately and has been written in liaison with the police. Staff follow the procedures closely and are proactive in their attempts to identify the whereabouts of young people if they go missing. These attempts are well documented and demonstrate their evident concern for the safety of the young people in their care. Young people say they are welcomed back by the staff when they return from a period of unauthorised

absence. Records evidence that the reasons for any absences are recorded and new strategies are put into place to try to minimise future occurrences.

Staff and young people were observed to enjoy relaxed and good humoured interaction. There is clarity about the expectations of young people's behaviour and they respond well to the openness and trust shown by the staff. Anti-social behaviour and lack of respect is consistently challenged in a straightforward but warm way. The environment is designed to ensure that staff spend the majority of their time with the young people. The message that staff enjoy young people's company helps raise their self-esteem and their desire to please the staff. Records clearly state individual behaviour management strategies and also identify young people's strengths and positive behaviours. This provides a rounded picture of the young person and gives excellent guidance to staff about the best way to handle each individual. All sanctions and restraints are recorded in the young person's file as well as the dedicated record books. The restraint book shows a recent omission of one detail required to monitor this record.

There are excellent systems in place to ensure the safety of young people. These include regular fire drills, health and safety checks and very comprehensive risk assessment records. These systems are monitored on a monthly basis by the manager who shares the results with her supervisor. All issues highlighted as needing action are dealt with quickly and effectively.

There are corporate safe recruitment processes that are led by the council's central team. In addition the manager ensures all the necessary checks and references are satisfactory before starting a new member of staff. Staff have to undertake an induction programme that covers all of the necessary core areas of care before taking responsibility for young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The support offered to individual young people is exceptional. This is given following very comprehensive assessment of their needs and a plan of action to meet these. Young people are enthusiastic about the way they have been helped by the staff and the records confirm this. Young people are shown respect and are helped to value themselves as well as others. Staff express positive views about the young people they care for and express delight in their achievements and sadness in their disappointments. This leaves young people in no doubt that they are cared for.

The home actively promotes education as important and staff liaise with other agencies to provide a range of imaginative experiences for the young people. These including work experience placements, part time schooling and college courses. Young people are supported to continue to attend their previous school where assessed as beneficial to them. The home has a well equipped education room where young people can access a computer, books, arts and craft and the constant support of staff. This is particularly helpful when young people are suspended from or refusing school. All young people have their education needs assessed and reviewed. There are clear education plans for each young person. Young people are rewarded for their attendance at school and there is evidence that attendance has improved significantly for some since being at the home. All achievements are celebrated and young people are encouraged to be proud of themselves for their effort as well as their successes.

Young people's interests are used as a basis for the activities offered. Those who do not express particular interests are helped to develop them, with staff involvement if this is beneficial. Staff show interest in young people's knowledge and skills and enjoy learning from each other. There are enough resources to follow up individual interests and activities. The balance between group, individual activities and free time is very good. This helps young people learn to manage their own time effectively.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Very comprehensive written placement plans covering all areas of need are developed from the assessments undertaken prior to, or soon after placement. The home often takes emergency placements without the benefit of full information but the manager and staff are proactive in obtaining this at the earliest opportunity. Where young people need to move onto more appropriate placements the staff are very involved in the planning of those moves. Staff understand the reality of the shortage of available resources and do everything they can to provide appropriate and good quality care to the young people they are entrusted with.

The records show a very clear trail of the progress made by each young person and the way their care plans have changed to take account of this. Exceedingly useful monthly reports are written on each young person highlighting progress, changes of behaviour and any additional needs in each outcome area. These are written by the key worker and shared at the regular statutory reviews. Young people confirm that they attend their reviews and are aware of the plans for their future.

A contact plan is in place for each young person. This details the agreed contact with family, friends and previous carers. Young people confirm that they are supported in their contact arrangements. Friends are welcomed into the home, unless they pose a threat to the young people. Staff are sensitive to the importance of family to the young people and provide emotional support during times of distress or disappointment. Young people who have less involvement with their family are given additional attention on occasions such as birthdays and Christmas to help them feel equally special. There is close liaison with family members to update them about the progress of the young people in the home.

Although young people feel they have little choice of placement they are very positive about the way they were prepared and welcomed into the home. Some said that they had been really anxious about the placement but had been helped by prior visits from the staff to explain what was on offer. Extremely detailed and sensitive plans are made to help young people move on to other placements or return home, including the provision of additional resources to the family. Staff often continue to offer support on an outreach basis to young people who have moved on in order to help them settle.

Young people's views and opinions are sought by staff on an ongoing basis throughout the day. Young people expect to be involved in all arrangements including the buying of food and provisions, the planning of activities and celebrations, and the timing of meals. Young people are clearly central to the organisation of the home and their views are seriously considered by the staff. Young people meet together daily at mealtimes but also have scheduled meetings, with an agenda and minutes, on a regular basis. Young people feel they can talk to any of the staff and be confident that their views will be heard. There is also close liaison with those who are important to the young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

There are impressive independent living plans that detail the skills to be learnt and the action necessary to achieve this. A chart records progress and identifies the individual targets of each young person such as opening a bank account or obtaining a passport. Gaining part time work, managing budgets and using the washing machine all feature on the plans. Young people say they are helped to build confidence in their ability to look after themselves in the future and express pride in their achievements. Staff try to provide young people with a clear and realistic idea of the resources likely to be available to them when they leave the looked after system and help them develop strategies to manage these.

The home has been extensively refurbished in order to provide suitable accommodation for young people. Staff were involved in the plans for the redevelopment and moved in earlier in the year. The home now provides excellent accommodation in a domestic setting. Young people have single, lockable bedrooms and access to a range of different communal spaces. These include a large kitchen/diner, lounge, quiet room and education room. There are separate facilities for staff to ensure privacy. The decoration is bright and furnishings are modern and comfortable. Young people are encouraged to personalise their rooms and are provided with the resources to do this if necessary. The home is on a busy main road with easy access to the main town. There is a safe enclosed garden, car parking space and additional recreation areas are close by.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All young people are valued and their individual needs are understood and met by staff who are committed to their care. Young people are encouraged to respect others differences and are helped to develop strategies to manage any negative feelings they may experience in their dealings with other people. Placement plans identify cultural, religious and gender needs and detail how these will be met. Staff provide care in a family atmosphere and ensure all young people develop a feeling of belonging. Young people's different social circumstances are understood and sensitive handling of resources ensure that the young people have equal access to them.

The Statement of Purpose has recently been rewritten and provides an accurate picture of what is on offer. Young people receive additional information about the home with useful contact numbers and advice.

The staff are very experienced in providing residential care to young people and are committed to continual improvement. They present as confident, competent and relaxed in their care of the young people. It is clear that they enjoy their company and are able to manage the range of challenges posed by them. There is an excellent mixture of professionalism and open, spontaneous responses to young people. Staff trust each other and feel very supported by the current management arrangements.

Over 80% of staff have the necessary qualifications to care for young people and many exceed these. Induction and ongoing staff training is very good and appropriate supervision and appraisal systems are in place. Staff are reflective in their practice and continually question the success of the strategies they use with individual young people.

There are sufficient staff on duty at all times to meet the individual needs of the young people and there are flexible arrangements to allow the provision of more staff at challenging times. This allows the staffing levels to be reviewed on a daily basis to ensure young people's safety. There is a good gender balance and understanding of the need for staff to protect themselves as well as the young people in their care.

Internal monitoring systems are excellent and ensure that managers are aware of the challenges staff are dealing with. The safeguarding arrangements, introduced by the council, are particularly good at identifying serious risks to young people and involving a range of agencies in minimising these. Staff feel supported by this sharing of responsibility. Comprehensive policies and procedures have been developed by the council in conjunction with staff involved in residential care.

Record keeping in the home is exceptionally good. They are clear, comprehensive and easy to access. Records were seen to be up to date and accurate. Staff systematically record important information as it is made known. The records provide excellent evidence of the work undertaken with the young people and the progress they make. Young people can access the records and are invited to sign restraint and sanction books and to comment on the accuracy of the record.

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 the restraint book records the type of restraint used. (NMS 22.9)