

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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

This children's home is a semi-detached building on the outskirts of a large city centre. The service provides care for up to four young people aged between 10 years and 17 years old. The home is registered to provide care for young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties.

On the ground floor there is a lounge, kitchen, games room, office and small utility room. All young people have their own bedroom and bathroom. The staff sleeping in room and a further office are sited on the second floor. There is a garden that young people can use and the home is close to local amenities. The home is one of four homes owned and run by the organisation. There are three young people currently living in the home. Three young people were present and they all participated in the inspection.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

The purpose of this unannounced full key inspection was to follow up actions and recommendations made at the last inspection visit of 25 August 2010. The inspection also reassessed all the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The home's progress to meet previous shortfalls is adequate overall, although some of these continue. Most outcome areas are satisfactorily met and there are a few strong aspects. As a result, young people receive sound support and care which is suitably tailored to their individual needs. There is generally sound practice, so that the overall quality grading remains satisfactory. Several shortfalls are identified relating to staffing and records.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were two actions and one recommendation raised at the last inspection. In addition, there were four actions raised at the complaint investigation visit conducted on the same date. These related to the effective assessment and meeting of young people's individual needs; timely and accurate notifications under Schedule 5; security of first floor windows; appropriate supervision and training of staff in behaviour management and child protection; and the wording on the public liability insurance certificate.

The written placement plans viewed on young people's files state in adequate detail what their assessed needs are and outline broadly how these needs are to be met by the home. Recent admissions have been made in accordance with the home's Statement of Purpose, which includes short term and emergency placements. There is evidence that the appropriateness of placements is considered promptly, for

example, through reviewing each young person's risk assessment in the light of the change in dynamics introduced by the new placement. However, the effectiveness of plans is reduced because young people are rarely engaged in viewing their plans or making comments or contributions to them. Nevertheless, satisfactory action has been taken to meet regulation 12.

The manager has put in place a system to show staff what matters are to be notified to Ofsted and staff understand how to cross-reference their incident records to the notifications log. No notifications have been made to Ofsted since the action was raised. However, inspection of the incident records shows two instances of serious accidents were not notified to Ofsted. This indicates that practice is not yet robust with regard to notifications, and a further action is raised concerning this to ensure that young people are appropriately safeguarded.

The first floor window which opens onto the roof of the single storey extension now has an improved restrictor which young people cannot remove. Other windows to the first floor continue to be restricted by the devices formerly in place, although it is planned to replace all of these in due course. This action means that there have been no further instances of young people entering or exiting the building without the knowledge of the staff. This enhances the safety and welfare of young people by eliminating an unnecessary risk.

The registered person has obtained documentary evidence specifying that this address is insured under the group policy and this document is now displayed. This meets the standard regarding public liability insurance. Staff files and discussions with staff on duty demonstrate that staff receive appropriate training in behaviour management and child protection. However, staff are still unsure about their individual responsibilities to report allegations of abuse to the Local Safeguarding Children Board if they concern managers or if managers have not adequately reported them. In addition, the staff supervision logs still show that new staff, including waking night staff, are not receiving regular enough supervision. Overall, the improvements to staff support and expertise are adequate to enable them to provide a satisfactory standard of care and support to young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are involved in making decisions about their menus at their Saturday meetings. They enjoy suitable opportunities to shop for and prepare meals, as well as being encouraged to eat breakfast and evening meals together as social occasions in the dining area. Some young people are gaining increasing independence to budget, shop and cook in preparation for adulthood. Staff are flexible about young people's wishes to come downstairs for snacks and drinks in the night, striking a balance between young people's wishes and the establishment of good sleep patterns. Records are kept to show what young people have actually eaten and a balanced diet is offered with regular meal times. Young people's eating patterns are making some improvement and healthy choices of fruit, vegetables and breakfast

cereals are promoted well.

Staff facilitate an active lifestyle by walking with young people to nearby shops rather than using the car. Friday is designated for physical activities. Membership of local sports centres and gyms is encouraged, as well as walking the home's adopted dog when the staff member concerned is on duty. Each young person has a clear health plan and is registered with local medical, dental, optical and psychological help to properly meet their identified health needs. Staff support and encourage young people to attend appointments and to pay good attention to their personal hygiene for their own improving health and self-confidence. The home's 'zero tolerance' approach to all alcohol and drugs is backed by positive involvement with the local police. This means that young people are increasingly healthy and reducing their misuse of substances. Young people are also successfully reducing their smoking through involvement in a programme called 'Fresh Start', brought to them by the looked after children nurse.

Staff are trained in first aid and administer medications safely. Robust records are kept to safeguard young people. Systems for the storage and use of prescribed and 'household' medication are also safe, with appropriate consents both from those with parental responsibility and medical practitioners. However, two incidents involving young people being taken to hospital have not been recorded as accidents or injuries in the accident record. In addition, the medication record does not state in all cases how medications have been disposed of. These shortfalls have not adversely impacted upon young people because incident records show that young people were appropriately treated and managers remember how all medications have been safely disposed of.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people's privacy is well respected and it is balanced adequately with their safety. For example, young people know how to complain and are confident to share their opinions with staff. Complaints are adequately dealt with and records show this. Young people also have their own room key and staff do not go into their rooms unless invited. In order to safeguard them from potential harm, young people are monitored by staff from the landing and must keep doors wide open if they invite anyone into their bedroom. Young people enjoy the privacy of their own en-suite bathrooms, although these cannot presently be unlocked from the outside if there was an emergency. This compromises their safety in this event. Young people understand the reasons why their rooms might need to be searched and there are procedures for this. However, the records regarding this do not detail clearly how prohibited items are safely disposed of, or follow all aspects of the home's stated procedure. Young people have not been adversely affected by this shortfall because confiscated items have been safely disposed of.

Young people are adequately protected from abuse by the home's procedures and by staff training and knowledge of child protection procedures. Staff are well versed in

using the reporting lines through the home's own organisation, but are not clear enough about direct reporting to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) if an allegation of abuse is made involving the registered person or person in day-to-day charge. Nevertheless, an updated child protection policy addressing this is currently with the LSCB for comment.

There is an atmosphere where bullying is known to be unacceptable. The issue is openly talked about with young people and addressed when appropriate in individual key-working sessions. Risk assessments consider bullying and staffing is kept at a one-to-one level. Consistent staff responses to particular instances are achieved through the manager's use of memos displayed in the office. As a result, young people are well protected from bullying. Young people are being satisfactorily assisted to develop acceptable behaviour through constructive praise and individual daily rewards. Young people also have individual behaviour management plans, although these do not give very detailed or useful advice for staff on specific strategies to use with individuals to maximise consistency and effectiveness. Sanctions and restraints are not unreasonable and training covers reducing the need for physical restraint. However, the sanction of removing activities that cost money is not working well and less negative sanctions are being considered. Young people's behaviour is improving significantly, but records about behaviour incidents, sanctions and restraint are not being used to best effect to engage young people and help them to make maximum progress in these areas.

Instances of absence without authority are presently much reduced. Young people are therefore safer because they are not exposed to abusive or risky situations without adequate adult supervision. Managers' state that clear boundaries, effective window restrictors, close supervision, following young people off-site and positive input from staff and community police officers, have all contributed to this improvement in young people's safety. Improved protocols with the local police also include a pre-prepared 'missing person profile' for each young person. This document is immediately forwarded to the police to save time in the event of a young person going missing, further supporting their speedy and safe return.

The home provides suitable physical safety and security to young people. Training, procedures and checks ensure that the building and utilities are safe and adequate for purpose, both day-to-day and in the event of an emergency. Staff do not start until the vetting process is completed. Visitors to the home are checked and monitored to keep young people safe. Staff are better trained in using the notification system to ensure that the appropriate agencies are informed about events. For example, all staff know that Ofsted must be notified of the instigation of any child protection investigation. However, they have omitted to inform Ofsted about serious accidents resulting in a hospital check. This has not adversely affected young people's safety because the incidents were recorded and appropriate treatment obtained.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people receive a good level of individualised support from committed staff and managers who are consistently available to them and work to nurture positive relationships with them. Access to personal, health, social and sex education is mostly provided through key-working sessions, with some referral to specialist professionals where appropriate, although there can be long waiting times for these. Staff actively try to include each young person in the social group of the home, for example, through the weekly meetings and group mealtimes. They also support them in developing social and independence skills, including some knowledge of their local community and wider social issues.

Particular success is being achieved presently with every young person attending education, either at the education unit or at the local college. This is very valuable to each young person in improving their chances as adults. Each young person's personal education plan is up-to-date and staff are giving very positive feedback and rewards to young people for establishing a work routine and committing to their studies. Leisure activities which are active and healthy are provided as well as opportunities to go shopping or to the cinema or skating. There is a good balance of group and individual outings and a good balance of home-based and outdoor free time, based upon each young person's risk assessment. For example, young people enjoy playing pool or using the games console in free time at the home. As a result, young people are settled and are developing confidence and social skills.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are appropriately placed and their needs are being adequately assessed and met in the home. Their care plans, behaviour plans and risk assessments are kept under review and key worker sessions and monthly reports indicate areas where young people are receiving input and making progress. Young people are adequately encouraged to participate in reviews and express their feelings and views, but staff do not go far enough with this. As a result, young people's views and comments are rarely documented on their records and they do not view their files. Young people are not sufficiently helped to understand the significance of engaging actively in their plans and records and do not see how it benefits their personal progress and self-confidence. Nevertheless, relationships between staff and young people are based on honesty and mutual respect. Key-work sessions and planned input take place with sufficient regularity.

Staff and managers advocate adequately for each young person and are generally proactive in reviews and arrangements, so that timely planning for young people takes place. However, young people are not always aware of what long term arrangements are being considered by their placing authorities. Managers say that this is because plans that may not come to fruition are unnecessarily unsettling for

young people when a period of stability in the home is the current aim. Contact arrangements with family members are supported, facilitated and supervised so that relationships can be rebuilt and improved wherever this is appropriate for young people's welfare. As a result, young people are able to move into and leave the home in a generally positive way. For example, some young people spend increasing amounts of time back at home in a planned way. With the support of staff and managers, they are able to help their family members in times of illness.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people receive care which helps to prepare them for adulthood. For example, the daily life of the home provides opportunities for them to take care of their personal hygiene, their possessions and personal space, and increasingly of their own money. Staff also work with young people to help them develop self-esteem, positive relationships and sustainable work and leisure routines. Staff help young people to exercise good choices in the clothes and items they buy. They also sometimes supervise all their spending as a sanction if it has been spent on illegal substances. Staff keep young people's money in safe keeping, but encourage them to save and manage their own finances as part of preparation for independence. Reward monies may be earned in addition to pocket money and allowances. However, the records of these do not adequately account for monies earned, spent or left in safe-keeping. This is a missed opportunity for young people to take on more responsibility for making and monitoring these records.

Young people enjoy a more homely environment since the recent refurbishment of the lounge, hall, games room and dining room. However, the kitchen is damp and its cupboards are in poor repair. The freezer is iced-up and there is a trailing lead to the dishwasher. In addition, the lounge flooring is not in a good state of repair or homely. There is no telephone for the exclusive and private use of young people. Young people are able to ask for the 'phone from the office, but do not presently have privacy for personal calls or access to use the internet. In some instances young people have agreed restrictions in place to secure their safety in regard to these communications, but the telephone facilities do not presently meet minimum standards. There are no desk or table facilities in the bedrooms for young people to study quietly. These shortfalls reduce the homeliness of the accommodation that young people enjoy.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The home's Statement of Purpose and the young person's guide provide detailed information about the service they can expect from the home and this is reviewed. However, it does not give the actual qualifications of the manager and staff. There are also a number of points requiring update and correction. Staff are suitably vetted and evidence of this is available. However, evidence of staff induction training is not

on some staff files, for example, when induction takes place at another of the group's homes.

There are still too few staff trained to the equivalent of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in the care of children and young people, although staff are due to commence this in January 2010. In addition, the manager has not yet completed his management training. Levels of supervision are not meeting requirements, especially for new and night staff. Staff meetings are not taking place regularly enough. These shortfalls in staff support hold back the consistency and quality of input to young people. Nevertheless, there is a committed staff group, including a competent deputy. Rotas ensure a good balance of male and female staff, a regular waking night member of staff, and regular relief staff to cover illness and holidays. This means that young people know those who are looking after them.

There is a good level of in-house training provided to all staff, for example, in behaviour management, restraint, health and safety, medication, emergency aid, and child protection. A quiz has been devised and will be used shortly to challenge staff on their knowledge of policies, procedures and standards. However, staff are still unclear about their personal duties to report child protection concerns directly to the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), in particular when concerns relate to managers who are part of the usual reporting line.

Training and mentoring takes place day-by-day from managers and senior staff to teach staff how to record and report appropriately and consistently, for example, if a matter requires notification. Staff are providing better role models for young people now, for example, by ensuring that they are not seen smoking. The home's area manager conducts regular monitoring visits to the home which helps to drive continuous improvement. However, various shortfalls in recording have not been identified until inspection. These have the potential to reduce the effectiveness of work with individual young people. In addition, improvements to the decoration and maintenance of the building take some time to implement and there are no time-limited action plans. Nevertheless, essential maintenance work takes place within adequate timescales to ensure that young people enjoy satisfactory standards of living.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Young people's case files adequately reflect their individuality and needs. Care plans, reviews, risk assessments and behaviour management plans are in place, showing each young person's history and progress. However, young people are not actively encouraged enough to engage in viewing or adding to records made about them. Systems are in place for this, including prompts and space on many records, for example the monthly progress record and behaviour management plan. Staff are not explaining the learning and inclusion benefits to young people in a convincing way. As a result, young people rarely make a positive contribution to plans and strategies which are personal to them. This holds back young people's commitment and the potential for success and progress.

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
20	ensure that all significant events are notified to the appropriate authorities, in particular, serious accidents sustained by young people accommodated in the home (regulation 30(1) Schedule 5)	06/01/2010
28	ensure that staff receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (regulation 27(4)(a))	06/01/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that a written record is kept of all accidents by or injuries to children during their placement at the home (NMS 12.3)
- ensure that the medication record shows how medicines are disposed of when medication ceases (NMS 13.2)
- ensure that the home's guidance regarding room searches is consistently followed, in terms of recording in the 'prohibited items book' and disposal of articles (NMS 9.8)
- ensure that staff are able to open the doors to bathrooms, showers and toilets from the outside in the case of emergency (NMS 25.6)
- improve the use of existing systems, records and written agreements as tools for facilitating young people's involvement in decisions about their lives (NMS 8.1)
- ensure that young people's money is kept in safekeeping for them, in particular that there are clear records of young people's incentive money (NMS 11.8)
- ensure that the interior of the home is maintained in a good state of repair, in particular the kitchen and lounge flooring, and make available facilities conducive to study (NMS 24.3 and 12)
- ensure that one or more telephones are provided for the exclusive use of children in the home in private, with acceptable levels of privacy for personal calls (NMS 24.11)
- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff have completed their Level 3 in the Caring for Children and Young People NVQ, and that new staff begin working towards such qualification within three months of joining the home (NMS 29.5)
- ensure that staff meetings occur at least monthly and that all staff are aware of

- all items discussed (NMS 28.10)
- provide evidence of induction training for all newly appointed care and ancillary staff and ensure that staff are clear about accountability and reporting lines to be followed in relation to child protection. (NMS 31.2)