

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Graham Robinson
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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

The home is a 72-foot narrow boat that travels around the canal network. It accommodates one young person of either sex for both short and longer term placements. The home is managed by a private company. The length of a placement is dependent on need. Education packages are put together to suit the needs of individual young people.

The inspection commenced three days after a young person had completed an eight week, planned placement, so it was not possible to speak with a young person during the inspection. The evidence and data referred to in the report is based on this most recent placement.

Overall effectiveness

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

The progress made both socially and educationally by young people is satisfactory, based on their starting points. Individual needs are identified, with plans and strategies put into place to address them. Systems have been created to monitor the progress and development made by young people. Staff have skills that enable them to create a supportive environment, underpinned by clear boundaries.

Young people are cared for by a staff team of varying experience, who work positively to meet their needs in non-punitive ways. Staff demonstrate an understanding of safe working practices, linked to young people's individual needs. This helps to ensure young people's welfare is being promoted positively.

The management and organisation of the service is currently satisfactory, but improving. The manager is starting to have a positive affect in establishing working practices and daily routines with a staff team that is still developing, following the departure of some longer-serving staff. The strengths and weaknesses of the service are assessed and there are suitable plans for continued development.

Staff are well supported generally, but the formal supervision programme for staff is not taking place with the expected frequency or consistency. Reports from external monitoring visits have no provision where the views of young people, their parents or staff can be reflected.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the formal supervision of staff takes place with greater regulatory and consistency (NMS 19.4)
- ensure the format for external monitoring reports contains sections that allow for the views of young people, their parents and staff to be reflected. (NMS 21)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are currently experiencing outcomes that are satisfactory. Appropriate systems and working practices are in place, designed to promote and support young people towards achieving positive outcomes in all areas of their lives. However, getting young people to engage fully at all stages of their residence has met with mixed success rates, as young people take time to settle and work through difficulties.

The ethos and practices being developed by the service are supportive and encourage young people towards setting and achieving personal goals. Many of the young people placed have experienced periods of disruption and chaos in their lives. Their placement with this service allows them the opportunity to settle and take stock of their lives in a way that enables them to start making appropriate choices and decisions about their future.

The flexibility and mobility of the service allows young people to maintain regular contact with appropriate family and friends. Staff actively encourage and facilitate contact in various ways, for example, by taking young people to their home areas, whatever the distance to fulfil various appointments. This helps young people to maintain contact and avoid feeling isolated.

Educational arrangements are put into place to suit individual need. For example, recently one young person had a 25-hour weekly educational package which included both formal and informal education. The service has access to the organisation's own educational facilities which oversee young people's educational development. Formal education is provided by tutors from this facility. The aim is stimulate and re-engage young people positively with their formal education programmes. This helps to prepare young people towards integrating back into future educational settings.

Young people's health needs are positively promoted. Dependent on personal circumstances, young people either retain registration with their own health services, or are registered with more local community-based health services. Whatever the choice, young people have access to day-to-day health support. Links with more

specialised services are in place and can be activated dependent on need.

Young people are encouraged to improve their lifestyles through diet and exercise. They are provided with information and given every encouragement and practical support to modify certain aspects of their lifestyle, such as use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol. This is aimed at improving young people's general health and fitness levels.

Young people are encouraged to actively contribute to certain aspects of the service's daily operation. For example, one young person experienced a sense of achievement when it was thought they were capable enough to steer the narrow boat during its journey along the canal. An example like this, alongside more targeted areas of work and development, encourage young people towards taking more responsibility for their own actions and gives them a sense of self-worth and well-being.

The mobility of the service gives young people opportunities to visit different areas and actively encourages them to take full advantage of the resources and community facilities available to them. This helps young people to settle into their new environment and experience leisure activities that may be new to them.

Quality of care

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

Staff work hard to establish and maintain positive relationships with young people, which encourages them to settle and develop trust. This can take time. The service is designed to work positively with young people, whatever challenges they make, in an effort to modify and stabilise behaviour to a level where young people can relax and start to take some responsibility for their own actions. This results in reducing stressful experiences for young people.

Along with the daily interaction between staff and young people, more formalised systems are in place to encourage consultation with young people. For example, the manager recently introduced a written format through which young people are invited to give their views and thoughts on a variety of areas affecting them. This is done monthly and runs in conjunction with the manager's own monthly monitoring responsibilities. This gives young people a feeling of being valued and a sense that their opinions and views do matter.

Young people are provided with information and the means to make complaints if they wish. The young people's guide provides much of this information as well as containing the contact details of a variety of external agencies charged with promoting young people's rights.

Staff try to create a warm and supportive environment with the aim of enabling young people to thrive. The success of this differs with each young person placed. Their individual needs are identified in care plans and individual risk assessments, which includes identity, religious and cultural needs. The plans and aims of the

placement are reviewed regularly. This gives young people a sense of direction along with agreed and achievable targets to aim for.

Staff work openly and transparently with young people. As a result, young people are provided with care in an environment that promotes trust and can help them to develop greater confidence in themselves and others.

The narrow boat contains modern facilities and young people have their own bedrooms which have their own hot and cold water supply. The levels of equipment, fixtures, furnishings are of a good standard and the boat is well maintained.

Staff promote healthy lifestyles in a variety of ways. Young people are encouraged to engage in a range of activities, individual interests and leisure pursuits. For example, individuals have opportunities to follow their own interests and leisure pursuits, which are usually community based. These are reflected in the activity planners that are completed weekly.

Young people benefit from healthy meals and take an active role in planning menus, shopping and where appropriate, food preparation. They are encouraged to try unfamiliar foods, appreciate different cultures and try international cuisine

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The procedures and working practices to keep young people safe are good. Staff are committed towards keeping young people safe who can on occasions, due to their own actions, put themselves at risk. Staff understand their responsibilities and what they should do if a safeguarding situation arises. This results in prompt referral to the appropriate external agencies in the area where the service is at that time. The service has developed links with a number of external agencies with safeguarding responsibilities; contact details are held on board.

Staff know how to respond should any young person go missing and are aware of local protocols and practices in place to protect them. The manager downloads the relevant protocols depending on the service's locality. The potential vulnerability of a young person should they go missing is recognised and strategies are in place to respond to any future incident. Staff are prepared to go to great lengths to keep young people safe. This helps to give young people a feeling of security and general safety.

Serious behaviour management issues are usually handled well by staff without resorting to outside assistance, although this remains an option if safety is compromised. The ethos that continues to develop is to work positively and patiently through difficulties. Reward systems for good behaviour are in place and recognisable boundaries are laid out in the information given to young people at the beginning of their placement. All staff have received initial training in positive handling.

Appropriate recruitment policies, procedures and practice ensure all staff are suitably cleared prior to taking up their posts. This ensures only suitably checked people have contact with young people.

Young people are protected with a range of risk assessments. They are given information and practice so they can safely exit the boat in an emergency. Safety checks to maintain a safe environment are regularly undertaken.

Leadership and management

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

The organisation and management of the service is adequate, but improving. The manager who has only been in post for a relatively short period is starting to make progress in her drive to move the service forward positively. The manager is enthusiastic, child focused and has a clear vision on how the service should develop and progress. There have been a number of changes in the permanent staff group, resulting in a team of staff with varied experience. However, staff understand their role and responsibilities and work with the support of the manager to address young people's needs.

The formal supervision programme has not taken place with the expected frequency and consistency. However, the manager has recently worked shifts with all staff and has been in a position to offer support when required. Longer-serving staff have all gained an appropriate professional qualification. Newly recruited staff are currently undertaking formal induction. Basic staff training is included in this process which includes safeguarding and positive handling, along with other areas. The components of a full staff team are in place and there is a desire by the manager to reduce the use of agency staff.

The organisation operating the service has its own training department and staff have access to the ongoing core staff training programme; this aids staff development and improves their knowledge and working practices. The training programme covers the expected areas and is designed to ensure that staff possess the competences and skills to effectively meet young people's diverse needs.

The monitoring of the service is an area of improvement. A previous requirement for the external monitoring of the service to take place consistently, within the required timeframe, has been achieved. Internal monitoring takes place consistently and both the external and internal monitoring of the service meets with regulatory requirement.

External reports contain elements of evaluation and identify areas for improvement. However, there is no provision in the report format to gain and reflect the views of young people, their parents or staff. Reports from internal monitoring are thorough in checking that required tasks are carried out, but are light on evaluation regarding the service's general performance and overall effectiveness. A written development

plan is in place.

The manager feels well supported and demonstrates an understanding of the service's strengths and areas in need of improvement. The service is in a period of transition based on the recent changeover of staff. However, the manager and staff demonstrate a genuine commitment to support young people through troubled times so they can look to the future with some positivity and improve their outcomes. This gives young people a platform to settle on as well as some sense of security.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.