

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stephen Trainor
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's residential unit is operated by a local authority and provides care for up to six young people of either sex aged from 11 to 17 years. The unit takes emergency placements. Placements are also available for young people bailed or remanded by a court.

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 **outstanding**.

All the young people receive a high standard of care and this means they commit to their placements, work hard, and learn how to take full responsibility for their behaviour. Individuals are very clear about their placement arrangements, show excellent commitment, and provide their best cooperation allowing each of them to make excellent progress, both socially and educationally. Young people continuously achieve and develop from the consistent support and approaches they receive from a highly experienced staff team. The Registered Manager is monitoring staffing arrangements to ensure they are not stretched too thinly following recent changes to the staffing structure.

Keyworker systems are particularly effective. Young people build their self-knowledge, self-awareness and emotional resilience to the challenges they face throughout the time that they live at the home. Young people improve their decision-making skills and this clearly contributes to keeping them safe. Young people enhance their skills through programmes run by staff who champion various areas including education, equality and diversity, health and well-being and health and safety. All young people gain accredited Certificates of Personal Effectiveness.

Relationships between young people and with staff are excellent and each young person shows that they value difference. Young people are involved in many aspects of charity work through the participation work that takes place. All the young people state that they feel safe while living at the home. There is excellent safeguarding for residents through clear and agreed strategies, protocols, risk assessments and

placement plans. Young people make better lifestyle choices. A wide range of professionals and agencies gave extremely positive comments and these unanimously agreed that the service provides a high quality of care and this was keeping young people safe.

Young people's efforts are rewarded and clear incentives help to change behaviours. Young people are cared for by an experienced, competent, and highly motivated team of staff. Staff are fully up-to-date with professional and legal developments following extensive changes to inspection frameworks. The promotion of young people's health and well-being is excellent. Recreational interests are supported very well. All the young people's education programmes are well thought out, all are working very well and there is excellent attendance and attainment at respective schools and colleges. Young people have embraced their learning and development opportunities.

The young people are extremely relaxed within their home. The home's environment is very supportive and underpinned by defined boundaries. Young people's views are consistently gathered and these influence the home's operation and future direction. Young people are involved in decision making that impacts on all aspects of their lives. Young people are in a position to fulfil their potential from their engagement in well-focused high quality placement plans. They develop excellent interpersonal skills and have tremendous confidence to succeed as they prepare for their next placement. There are few behaviour management problems.

The home's aims and objectives are clearly being fulfilled. This service has a clear impact on the lives of each young person and improves their future prospects. The views of partners are being gathered and these are used to shape future services. Regulation 33 and 34 monitoring reports are good overall but the level of analysis and evaluation, could be improved further. The Registered Manager has a comprehensive development plan that demonstrates the capacity to plan continuous improvements.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home. Specifically, increase the amount of evaluative evidence and range of consultation within Regulation 33 and 34 reports to clearly show how further developments and improvements will be secured. (NMS 21.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people experience stable placements and make significant progress in many areas, including their social presentation, self-awareness and taking responsibility for their behaviour. As a result, young people develop and mature. The young people are extremely confident in their placements. Young people collectively state that the experience of living at the home, 'changes lives'. An ex resident commented, 'The home provided me with opportunities otherwise I wouldn't get'. Significant progress is being made by all residents and they are able to make responsible and mature decisions.

Young people have a clear understanding of their plans and arrangements. They extend their full or best cooperation resulting in them being in a very good position to fulfil their potential. Partners commented that achievements are remarkable considering the starting points of some of the young people.

Young people achieve personal goals and this helps them to develop a better understanding and appreciation of their personal circumstances. Young people can motivate themselves, especially to attend meetings, where they express their views with some confidence. Some young people develop confidence to chair their own meetings. Each young person is optimistic about their futures. All have clear aspirations and believe that they have secured a better future from the time they have spent at the home.

Young people living at the home are treated fairly and staff practice supports their individual needs. Young people gain tremendous benefits from the high levels of emotional support they receive from staff with the skills, motivation and abilities to form very positive working relationships with young people and sustain them. This is particularly evident in maintaining relationships with family and friends and reducing risk-taking behaviours. Young people have learnt how to keep themselves safe.

Young people are enthusiastic about their education and college placements. All work hard to complete their secondary school education, complete GCSE examinations and secure meaningful future employment. This is a tremendous achievement considering many of them have had limited or disjointed education experiences in the past. Young people's willingness to participate has resulted in high attendance and attainment. Each young person has grown in confidence through their wide range of learning experiences. Education is coordinated highly effectively at this home. A social worker commented, 'Learning is supported in so many different ways, including, independence, safety, finance'. Young people gain masses of accredited certificates of personal effectiveness to show exactly where progress is made.

Young people enjoy good health and choose healthy lifestyles. They take responsibility for their health and make clear links between diet and exercise. Regular activities ensure they remain physically active. All young people are familiar with their health arrangements, are aware of the contents of their health plans and attend their appointments with health professionals. All young people completed a recognised first aid course during the summer holidays allowing them to broaden their knowledge. They understand key health risks associated with risk taking behaviours such as smoking, drug and alcohol use as well as sexual health risks. Arrangements are managed sensitively ensuring young people are ready to receive

supportive services, such as for their mental health.

Young people gain many competencies and life skills through good quality experiences provided by in-house independence and social skills training programmes. Official pathway plans are introduced at the correct stage of the placement. Young people are proud to show off their independence files. A social worker commented, 'I have witnessed a young person moving into her own home; the staff were very proactive with regular support for the young person in their own home'. Young people build social resilience and life skills straight from the start of their placements from the high quality care they receive. Young people conduct themselves well at the home and the surrounding community. All are very well prepared for the world of work and fully aware of options open to them as they move to their next placement and adult life.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy excellent relationships with staff which enable them to engage positively and make good choices, for example, keeping themselves safe and getting the best from their placement. Staff are skilled and show great insight and understanding of young people's needs. As a result, young people appreciate and value the efforts of staff and work closely with them to plan their futures. Comments made by a social worker summarise relationships at the home, 'Young people appear to like the attitude of the staff towards them which is positive. Young people like being at this home'. The young people recently completed a staff appraisal exercise that commented very favourably on relationships. Staff practice supports young people to maximise their contributions. Young people are confident to express their views in their statutory reviews and there is also representation on a local children's care council and frequent in-house meetings.

High quality assessment and planning takes place, resulting in specific needs being met and reflecting young people's needs and charting their progress. Social workers receive frequent progress updates. All achievements are celebrated and this continuously builds young people's self-esteem. Records of achievement and certificates of personal effectiveness are proudly displayed by the young people. All partners confirmed that young people gain excellent benefits from the high quality practice and approach taken by staff. Young people's personalities prosper at this home.

Impact risk assessments have been used successfully to maintain a compatible peer group dynamic. One emergency admission during the summer was highlighted. Plans did not work out so a more appropriate placement option was located before there was any impact on the other residents. Young people make big improvements in their behaviour and all are relaxed, happy and confident in their placements. Independent Reviewing Officer comments show that young people fully engage with their arrangements. Equality and diversity are well established within the culture and ethos of the home and this means there are many opportunities to develop self-

knowledge and self-help skills. Young people's experiences and knowledge is maximised through excellent work coordinated through participation programmes and charity work. Young people learn how to contribute to the wider community.

Staff work extremely well in partnership with many different professionals and agencies to implement plans. Communication between staff, young people and their parents, social workers and other professionals is highly effective. The overall response being taken to support young people's needs is excellent. Consistent practice eliminates any potential confusion with the arrangements in place for each young person.

Each young person's educational potential is supported by proactive staff practice. The home's philosophy of care promotes the development of educational potential. A virtual school consultant supports arrangements very well in ensuring targets being set are supported and met. Care staff continuously emphasise the importance of young people gaining the best education. Each young person has a comprehensive education plan that works in practice to provide continuous learning and development opportunities. Young people show that they are fully committed to their education and have impressive attendance records. There has been great deal of success in maintaining existing school and college placements. Learning methods ensure young people develop key skills suited for adult life and the world of work.

Young people understand how to make a complaint. They confirm that complaints, if made, are responded to in full. A written guide covers complaints, with information, guidance and contact details of agencies such as Ofsted, children's rights and the Children's Rights Director. Young people can differentiate between grumbles and serious complaints. Young people have skills to sort out minor matters positively between themselves. This includes discussion or by raising matters during in-house meetings.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted. The key worker role is well developed to deliver health promotion work. Medication is stored safely, and records are maintained on the administration of medication, including prescribed and non-prescription medication. There are clear policies and procedural guidance and these are followed in practice. All staff receive suitable training to support health and well-being and this maintains the high quality of care being provided. An independent reviewing Officer confirmed, 'Well managed access to appropriate health care; well supported and monitored. The children looked after nurse is available to visit the unit on a regular basis and able to address any concerns of the young people'. There are very close working relationships with Children Looked After Nurses and this allows support to be targeted to the times young people are most in need.

Staff engage young people in a range of activities to develop individual potential and enhance learning opportunities. Young people's aspirations are supported and a suitable budget enables them to pursue their hobbies and interests. A good balance between organised activities and young people's free time supports their future independence. The premises are newly built and the appearance is excellent. All visiting professionals, family members and young people agree that 'The home is

maintained to an excellent standard'.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people confirm that they feel safe living at the home. They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they contribute to the home's operation. Young people develop skills that enable them to differentiate their behaviour according to the different settings and situations they find themselves in. Young people say that bullying is not an issue of concern to them and confirm that staff do not tolerate any form of bullying. They have confidence that staff will respond to any bullying that may occur. There is very good interaction and sensible discussion around difference, allowing members of the peer group to maintain a positive self-view. All young people understand the many forms that bullying can take and are equally clear about what to do if they have any concerns.

Well-coordinated safeguarding work supports children in making choices on how to lead their lives. This means all young people learn how to lead safe and fulfilling lives. Staff receive regular training to update their knowledge and have a good understanding of safeguarding policies, procedures and actions they should take when an incident arises and this allows young people to live in a safe and friendly environment. A social worker commented, 'The staff team excels at supporting young people to keep themselves safe by developing their social skills, self-esteem and confidence.' Young people have suitable safeguarding information. Policy and procedural guidance is consistent with that of the local safeguarding team's protocols. Good relationships are established with the safeguarding Local Area Designated Officer (LADO). The home's Registered Manager provided a suitable audit on all safeguarding matters from the home's records. This provided a comprehensive correlation against reported safeguarding matters.

Systems for dealing with young people who go missing from home are well established. Comprehensive risk assessments take account of a young person's potential to go missing. Risk assessments are agreed by all professionals supporting the young people. Strategies have been successful in reducing the number of times young people go missing without permission. A social worker commenting on safeguarding practice stated, 'The staff have supporting the young person I work with to reduce their missing from home episodes dramatically'. The police coordinator for missing children agreed that some children who had previously been renowned for having missing from home episodes are now leading stable lifestyles. The police coordinator also identified some consistent and innovative working practices underpinned by effective communications and good listening as being key to the positive lifestyle choices being made.

There are no concerns relating to how the home manages the young people's behaviour. Standard practice is to provide young people with the opportunity to reflect on incidents they are involved in. There has been a decrease in incidents over

recent months as young people take more responsibility for their behaviour. The home's management team work hard with partners to lessen the influence and impact that dysfunctional family units can have on young people's stability. Staff uphold children's rights. Young people respond very well to praise and rewards. When sanctions are used the young people usually decide their own sanction for any minor misdemeanours. Staff are clear that physical intervention is very much a last resort. All staff receive regular and refresher training in positive handling techniques.

Young people benefit from a permanent, experienced and stable staff team. Recruitment practice is robust, ensuring only suitable people work with young people. Equally good practice ensures the vetting of visitors to safeguard young people. Health and safety issues are managed well, ensuring young people and staff remain safe. Regular servicing of equipment and routine safety checks maintain a safe environment. Young people know what to do in the case of an emergency and can exit the home safely. Staff implement a range of risk assessments to identify and minimise hazards. There is a comprehensive audit of health and safety matters carried out on an annual basis.

Leadership and management

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

There is a clear vision for how the home should operate; this is fully in line with the new inspection framework, new evaluation schedule, and new national minimum standards. Staff fully comprehend these changes and importantly are able to talk about the impact change has had on their practice. Further enhancements have been made to the outstanding practice that was demonstrated at the last full inspection. Achieving positive outcomes is central to all practice.

Young people develop meaningful and lasting attachments because of the supportive management culture and the hard work of the staff. Young people are gaining tremendous benefits from experiences provided by a competent staff team. It is a strong, child-focused service that is conducive to young people developing and maximising their potential. Clear partnership arrangements underpin all practice and there is tremendous satisfaction with the high quality services provided. Staff are responsive to the specific needs and specific circumstances affecting both young people and their families.

This service is managed by an experienced and fully qualified manager. All partners confirm communication is highly effective with high quality care being provided consistently. Staff morale is excellent and energy levels high. Staff clearly 'go that extra mile' to provide the best possible experiences. Practice is developed by a management team that is perceptive in identifying the home's strengths and the areas where it could perform better. A comprehensive written and verbal self-assessment of the service was provided by the Registered Manager. The home's service history shows the assessment to be accurate. All levels of staff influence and shape the service with their ideas and initiatives.

The views of the young people and staff are captured during visits made to the home under the requirements of Regulations 33 and 34. The home's management team continually reflect on their practice and the home's operation. A range of evaluative documents in line with new framework, grade descriptors and evaluation schedule was provided. Reports produced make sense of the available data. The full impact and value that living at this home has had on young people's lives could be better represented within Regulation 33 and 34 reports. Some streams of work that have been highly successful have been overlooked and missed out within these important reports. Some realistic and challenging targets are outlined within the home's development plan.

Young people's individual needs, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are met. The young people have full confidence in the staff and know who is responsible for them at all times of the day and night. Staffing levels are maintained and a good gender balance is evident within the team. Shift patterns ensure excellent continuity with routines and procedures. The staff team is consistently supportive, attentive and sensitive to the care they provide for young people. Following recent changes to the staffing structure there has been a reduction in assistant managers, an increase in areas of responsibility for all staff, and the proposed introduction of an outreach service. Whilst it is evident that there has been no direct impact on the quality of service the Registered Manager is mindful of stretching staffing too thinly.

Records at this home show good clarity in how staff are managed. Detailed induction and foundation training are provided. Staff confirm that supervision is taking place. All permanent staff have relevant qualifications. There is access to higher level training. Systems for staff personal development and appraisal are well established and this helps staff to further enhance their skills sets. Challenging objectives are being set for staff as part of the management response when valuing individual performance.

Young people's placements are stable and the home's service history shows an excellent record in compliance. Few recommendations were set at the last two inspections. There is an effective system in place to notify persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events. There have been no concerns or complaints investigated by Ofsted between inspections.

Staff practice is supported by comprehensive written guidance, policies and procedures. These documents are also accessible through the responsible authority intranet. Information is written in plain English. The home's Statement of Purpose provides information in accordance with regulations. The ethos and working practices of the home clearly meet aims and objectives. The home's management team is proactive with their requests if minutes of meetings are delayed and this ensures placement plans and risk assessments remain fully up to date. Practice developments have seen review reports replaced with better formatted placements plans which are now used to focus discussions. Independent Reviewing Officers are having a bigger input into the management of children's placements in line with statutory guidance. Information provided at reviews is clear and helps to make decisions and plans for

young people's futures. The excellent ethos and culture established clearly fulfils the service aims and objectives and allows young people to build a great deal of resilience against the many challenges they face as they work towards securing a brighter future.

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.