

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sarah Oldham
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This service is a local authority children's home. The home provides care and accommodation for six young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

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 **good**.

Young people make good progress in relation to their initial starting point across all aspects of their welfare and development. This is underpinned by high quality support from staff. All care plans are highly personalised and reflect the young people's needs. These plans are kept under review to ensure that they continue to identify current levels of need. The staff have a strong knowledge of safe working practice and this further supports the young people. They benefit from clear boundaries and expectations and this makes them feel well cared for and secure. One young person said 'I feel really happy and safe living here.'

Young people live in a homely environment that is safe. They have positive relationships with staff and say that they feel that they and their views are valued.

This further contributes to their security and positive relationships. Anti-discriminatory practice runs through all aspects of the day to day care.

The home is staffed by an established staff team who hold relevant qualifications in caring for children and young people. Leadership and management of the home are strong with the manager having an excellent understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development. Robust monitoring systems in place ensure that any shortfalls are identified and acted upon swiftly. However, there is a small number of placement plans and records that require signatures of all those involved. A recommendation has been made in relation to this. This issue has been noted by the manager who is ensuring that this is completed within a timely manner.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files and to correct errors and add personal statements. This is in particular relationship to recording their views on their placement plans. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people benefit from individualised placement plans that are comprehensive and provide a clear overview of specific needs and how these are supported. These plans are kept under review. This ensures that any changes to individual needs are clearly identified and acted upon. Young people have regular individual key worker sessions that enable them to be consulted about their day-to-day life at the home and their plans for their future. They say that they feel they are always involved in decisions that are made about their life and their future.

Young people enjoy good physical and emotional health through attending routine health care appointments and receiving treatment as required. They are encouraged and supported to have a clear understanding of the importance of good health. The staff work closely with them to help them to have an understanding of the negative effects of risk taking behaviours such as smoking, alcohol or substance misuse can have on their health. Where this risk-taking behaviour is identified, appropriate external agencies are engaged. Young people can then access clear support in understanding how to minimise these risks and to improve their health care outcomes.

Young people enjoy a healthy diet and take part in the planning, shopping and preparation of meals. This helps them to develop skills in budgeting and increase their understanding in how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They also undertake other household tasks, appropriate to their age and stage of development, in preparation for independence.

The vast majority of young people attend education on a regular basis, either at main stream schools or specialist educational placements. The home is proactive in supporting education and where a young person is not in education ensures that they are supported to attend an appropriate placement. Individual work is also undertaken within the home whilst appropriate educational placements are being sourced. These measures help young people to progress with their education from their initial starting point to achieve good educational outcomes.

Contact arrangements are clearly identified and supported. Parents and professionals say that the staff work well to promote and, where identified, facilitate contact between young people and their family. This enables young people to maintain a sense of their identity. Where plans are in place for young people to return home, this promotes a positive transition for them.

Young people are supported to develop independence skills in accordance with their age and abilities. They are involved in planning menus, budgeting and shopping as well as contributing to the daily running of the home. Pathway plans are in place for

young people preparing for moving on. This enables young people to have formal support in moving onto independence. All young people spoken with during the inspection were exceptionally positive about the support that they have received in gaining skills for towards independence. One young person said 'I have learnt lots of things in the short space of time that I have been here and I know that this will help me when I am older and getting ready to live on my own.'

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff. They say they are supported really well and that staff care about them which they feel makes them feel happy and secure. One young person said 'this home is the best placement I have ever had. Staff listen to my views and help me to understand when it is not possible for me to do something. They don't just say no, they give a reason to help me to understand.'

Comprehensive placement plans are in place. These plans contain comprehensive information about all aspects of care, safety and wellbeing and include any that arise from their culture or religion. The plans are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that any changes in needs are clearly recorded and implemented. They also identify progress that young people make. The staff have a clear understanding of the specific needs of the young people and this enables them to be cared for effectively in a nurturing environment.

All young people are treated as individuals and comment positively about this. They are involved in decisions about their lives and all say that they contribute their views to their placement plans. They have regular house meetings and this enables them to collectively contribute their wishes and views about how the home operates. They are also consulted on an individual basis and complete regular feedback sheets. This enables the management team to have a clear overview of how the home is meeting the needs of young people.

Young people benefit from living in a healthy environment, where their individual health care needs are clearly identified and supported. Comprehensive health care plans identify all aspects of their health, including any previous health issues. Staff have a clear understanding of specific health care needs and provide support in accessing health care professionals. Clear records are maintained of health care appointments and any required health care intervention. Medication is stored securely and detailed records contain clear information about any medication administered and by whom. These measures support young people's health care effectively.

Education is actively promoted by staff at the home. The vast majority of young people attend school. Attendance is monitored to ensure continuity of education. Where alternative educational placements are required, staff work in close conjunction with education to ensure a suitable placement is identified. The staff encourage young people to achieve good educational outcomes by supporting them with their homework, maintaining excellent communication links with schools and attending parents' evenings and events. The achievements of young people are encouraged and celebrated.

Young people are supported to take part in a range of activities both within the home and in the community. The home has a range of books, toys and activity equipment suitable for the ages of the young people living at the home. They also take part in sports and recreational activities within the community, including football, horse riding and the use of leisure centres. They have taken part in regular holidays and outdoor pursuits. These are all appropriately risk assessed. These measures ensure that young people lead active lifestyles and have the opportunity to develop their interests and hobbies.

The home provides a comfortable and homely environment throughout. It is located on the outskirts of a small town with good access to local shops, recreational and educational amenities. Young people have been consulted and involved in planning the décor and furnishings. They all have their own bedrooms which they are supported to personalise to reflect their individual personalities. They are encouraged and supported to take pride in their home. One young person said, 'it is really nice here, my room is big and I am planning how I want it to be decorated, which is being done soon.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say that they feel very safe at the home. All staff have undertaken safe care and child protection training. The staff have a good understanding of the home's safeguarding procedures and are aware of the signs and symptoms of abuse, including how to report and manage any concerns. There is a clear procedure in place to follow in the event of a young person missing from home. The staff actively encourage and support young people to keep them informed of their whereabouts. In the event of a young person missing from care the staff endeavour to establish the young person's whereabouts. This includes searching the local area, contacting friends and known acquaintances, continually ringing the young person and liaising with police.

All young people have clear and detailed risk assessments in place. This enables staff to have a full understanding of any potential risks and effectively plan to minimise these risks. This ensures that young people's safety and well-being are effectively supported. This helps young people feel safe and well cared for. One young person said 'I know the staff really care about my safety and about me. That feels really good.'

Young people are effectively supported in managing their behaviours. Individualised behaviour support plans identify strategies for staff to use to minimise the risk of young people's behaviour becoming challenging. All staff have received training to respond positively and consistently to individuals' behaviour. This includes training in the use of physical intervention in the event of a young person posing harm to themselves. In recent months there have been no physical interventions. Clear strategies of de-escalation are used. This enables young people to reflect on their behaviours and understand how to deal with difficult situations. The use of sanctions or consequences is clearly discussed with young people. The home focusses on promotion of positive behaviours and there is a clear reward process in place. Young people say that this is a good idea. One young person said 'I think the reward

scheme is a really good idea and encourages and supports me to think about how I act.' Where any sanctions have been made, records demonstrate that they are fair and proportionate and this is a view held by the young people who are encouraged to record their views.

There have been a few incidents of bullying behaviours in recent months. However, the staff have been proactive in how this addressed. They provide clear support and guidance to the both the person being bullied and to the instigators of this behaviour. They follow this up with clear reports and action plans as well as informing social workers to ensure that a comprehensive level of support is provided to the young people.

Recruitment and selection procedures are robust. All staff have references checked and any gaps in employment explored. Criminal record checks are completed prior to any staff member commencing duty. These measures demonstrate that the home has taken reasonable steps to ensure that people who are unsuitable to work with vulnerable children are not appointed.

There have been no recent complaints. There are clear procedures in place to ensure that these are responded to appropriately and young people say that they feel confident that any complaint would be addressed appropriately.

The home provides a physically safe environment for the young people. Regular health and safety checks are undertaken and records maintained. These include regular fire checks and fire drills. Young people are included in these drills. This ensures that they are aware of what to do in the event of a fire. A comprehensive maintenance programme is in place to ensure that any repairs are undertaken promptly. These measures support the safety of the young people.

Leadership and management

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

The home has a Registered Manager in post who is suitably qualified and experienced and provides strong and effective leadership. The manager demonstrates a clear vision and direction of the service and this is highly valued by staff and young people. She is supported within her role by two deputy managers who are qualified and experienced to provide clear leadership in the absence of the manager. The management team work cohesively to ensure positive outcomes for young people. The staff team are established, experienced and have undertaken appropriate training and development to ensure that their practice is underpinned by a sound knowledge base.

The staff say that they feel extremely well supported within their role and receive regular supervision, attend training and staff meetings. They also have comprehensive daily handovers. This ensures that they are fully aware of the young peoples' needs on a daily, and longer term, basis.

The home's statement of purpose is an accurate reflection of the service and its aims and objectives. This document is made available to professionals and informs them about the home and the level of care that is provided. Young people receive a clear and comprehensive children's guide to the home. This explains all about the home, what they can expect from living there and provides an overview of what is available within local community.

Monthly independent visits to undertake Regulation 33 monitoring reports are in place. The home and Ofsted receive a copy of these reports and this helps the manager to have a clear oversight of how the home is operating. Bi-annual monitoring reports are completed by the manager and these also enable a clear focus on how the home is operating. Appropriate analysis is undertaken of information received to link in with the overall development of the service. Record keeping is comprehensive, which helps young people to understand their history, their current care needs and decision making processes as well as on-going plans for the future. Some documents have not been signed by placing social workers. Young people say that they have been involved in the development of their placement plan; however, these have not been consistently signed. Discussions with young people identified that they feel included within all aspects of planning for their care and future. All records are maintained securely and young peoples' files are comprehensive and well ordered.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.