

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC039689
Inspection date	3 June 2010
Inspector	Helen Walker
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	14 December 2009
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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

This local authority children's home provides medium to long-term placements for up to six young people, of either gender, from 13 to 17 years of age.

The home stands in its own grounds and is on a main road, with good transport links to the local town and other towns and cities in the area. There is easy access to schools, shops and leisure facilities.

There were five young people living at the home at the time of this visit.

Summary

At this full, unannounced inspection, the key national minimum standards in the all outcome areas were considered. The one recommendation made at the previous inspection was followed up and the outcome of this is noted in the improvement section of this report.

The home has weaknesses in the outcome areas of staying safe, economic well-being and organisation. However, the other outcome areas are good. Young people's health needs are positively promoted and a healthy lifestyle is encouraged. Young people especially enjoy the meals provided in the home.

Since April 2010 there has not been a Registered Manager in post although the recruitment process for this position is underway. At this time three assistant managers are in charge of the home. This is not an effective management arrangement and has led to inconsistency in the running of the home.

A number of incidents have resulted in the police being called to assist staff to deal with young people's challenging behaviour.

Staff take all reasonable steps to keep young people safe from harm and know how to respond in the event of any allegation or serious concern about a young person's safety.

Education is seen as an important part of the young people's lives and staff encourage school attendance.

The home is comfortably furnished and provides homely accommodation for young people. Bathrooms are in poor decorative order but arrangements are in place to improve them.

Four actions and four recommendations have been made to further promote the well-being of the young people. Actions relate to the monitoring of records, management of the home and staff employment records. Recommendations are for bathroom maintenance; to improve medication records; the development of young people's independence skills; and the provision of lockable storage for young people's personal possessions.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection one recommendation was made. This was to provide a current gas safety certificate for gas appliances and equipment in the home. The certificate is now available and demonstrates relevant safety checks are complete.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Staff understand the importance for young people to have a good choice of well-balanced meals so that they have a varied and healthy diet. A cook is employed weekdays and ensures young people's individual dietary needs are catered for.

Young people really like the meals in the home and describe them as 'wicked', 'enjoy the food; there is plenty and a good variety' and 'proper meals everyday'. Young people have the opportunity to shop, prepare and make meals, particularly at weekends, which helps them to learn skills for independence.

The home has a modern and suitably furnished dining room. This gives young people the opportunity to sit at the dining table and have meals in a social environment with the other young people and staff.

Young people's health needs are well-considered. They have good advice and guidance in relation to health and social matters. Young people confirm they have regular check-up visits to the dentist and optician, and see the local doctor as necessary. This enables their routine health needs to be met.

Some young people misuse drugs and alcohol which impacts on their health and behaviour. Staff actively discourage this behaviour and involve specialist agencies to support the young people. However, not all young people readily engage with these services.

Staff have a good awareness about the safe storage and administration of medicines. They hold a relevant first aid qualification to give first aid as needed. Although records of administration of medicines are kept, there is no central record to show the full details of medicines brought and stored in the home. Additionally, there is no routine monitoring of the medication system to confirm the records are accurate.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff are aware of the need to keep young people safe. They receive training and are familiar with safeguarding guidance. Staff follow this guidance in order to help to protect the young people from harm.

Young people have an individual bedroom which provides them with their own personal space. Most of the young people have a mobile phone and access to a telephone in the home. This allows them to make calls in private without reference to staff. Confidentiality is managed effectively and personal records are securely stored.

A number of incidents at the home meant police were called to assist staff to deal with young people's challenging behaviour. Management have since met with staff to ensure they are aware of and follow the home's protocol in respect of police involvement with the young people.

Incentive schemes encourage the young people's good behaviour and young people talk positively about what they can achieve. There are times when staff use physical intervention to prevent young people from causing significant harm to themselves or others and to prevent significant damage to property.

Records show a number of sanctions have been raised in relation to young people's behaviours. How effective the sanctions are is unclear. Monitoring of the physical intervention and the sanction records is insufficient to adequately establish these are appropriate actions to promote the welfare of the young people.

Staff have the support of the assistant managers and additional strategies have been put in place to try and manage young people's behaviour effectively. A multi-agency team of professionals also work with staff and young people to consider appropriate and positive ways to work with the young people.

Young people say bullying is not a significant issue in the home. However, there are instances when bullying does occur and some young people feel staff are not always effective in the way they deal with this. Individual risk assessments are in place and the staff promote an anti-bullying environment to support and safeguard the young people.

The complaints procedure is known to the young people they have the opportunity to raise any issues they are unhappy with. Any complaint is taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. Key worker sessions and house meetings give young people a forum to have their say. Young people have contact with people they can talk to who are independent of the home, such as the advocacy service, members of the county council corporate parenting board, and health and education professionals.

Good procedures are in place should young people go missing from the home. Staff record unauthorised absences fully, with details of the action taken to try to ensure the young person's safe return.

The home environment is well-maintained with systems in place for health and safety checks to be carried out. Young people and staff are aware of the fire evacuation procedures and know what to do in the event of a fire in the home.

Recruitment and employment checks are carried out by the provider to verify staff are suitable to work with young people. However, the full employment history of staff is not always sought.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people have good individual support from staff and external agencies, for example, the local multi-agency team of health and social work professionals. All young people have a designated key worker in the home. This allows young people the opportunity to talk about a diverse range of issues on a one-to-one basis, such as drug and alcohol misuse, and sexual and social relationships.

Education is seen as an important part of the young people's lives and staff encourage school attendance. Most of the young people have an educational placement. For those who are not in school, contact is made with relevant professionals to help them obtain a suitable educational placement, training or employment. This level of contact helps to promote and support young people's learning and to maintain their school placement. Personal education plans are drawn up with the relevant professionals and these show the home's awareness and contribution to the young people's educational achievements.

The home has facilities to support the young people's learning, such as books, board games and quiet areas in the house. Young people usually have access in the home to a computer with internet access and can use this for homework or in leisure time. At this time the computer is broken but arrangements have been made for its repair.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff involve young people in the development of their individual placement plans. Plans show how the young people's needs are to be met in the home. Staff are aware of the young people's assessed needs and the objectives of the placement.

The home has systems in place for the statutory review of young people's care. Key workers ensure young people's views are taken account of and encourage them to attend review meetings. Young people said they attend the meetings and have a say in decisions that affect their future. Young people's placement plans are updated and show the outcomes and actions required from the meetings.

Staff enable young people to make choices about contact with family and friends, in line with their care and placement plans. Staff actively promote contact so that young people continue to have positive links with those that are important to them outside of the home. Young people talk very enthusiastically about their contact with family and friends.

Admissions to the home are usually planned and involve a visit by the young person to meet staff and view the home. Where admissions are on an emergency basis the staff spend time discussing the placement with the young person to ensure they are familiar with the routines of the home. Staff try to adequately prepare young people for leaving the home and seek to ensure that this is through a planned ending to the placement.

Young people are asked their opinions about issues that affect their daily life and future. This includes their views about aspects of the running of the home, such as menus and activities. Young people personalise their bedrooms which may include wall posters and their choice of bedding. This level of consultation helps to improve young people's quality of life.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people benefit from staff who encourage them to learn skills that will help them as they move towards leaving care and independent living. Opportunities in the home allow young people to undertake household tasks and to gain an understanding about looking after themselves.

Some of the young people who are over 16 years of age have formal leaving care plans in place. The plans describe the need for young people to learn independence skills during their stay at the home. However, there is nothing to show exactly what skills need to be learnt so that young people are adequately prepared for leaving care and independence.

Overall the young people benefit from comfortable and homely accommodation. The home employs a maintenance person for the routine maintenance of the premises and quick repair or replacement of any items damaged. Additionally, they employ a domestic member of staff who helps to keep the home clean and tidy.

Young people have bedrooms with doors that they can lock. However, there are instances of thefts of personal possessions from bedrooms. Young people are upset that thefts occur. Management confirm arrangements have been made for new locks to be fixed to bedroom doors which will provide better security to keep personal possessions safe.

At this time the bathrooms are in poor decorative order and there is a problem with the internal door locks. Arrangements are already in hand for these matters to be rectified and brought up to the required standard.

Externally the grounds are well-kept with a large grassed area and mature trees. To the rear of the house is a paved patio with wooden seating, which provides a pleasant outdoor area for the young people.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There has been no Registered Manager in post since April 2010. The interim management arrangements of the home are insufficient to provide the necessary leadership and direction to the staff team. However, the recruitment process to appoint another manager is now underway.

Staffing levels are adequate to take account of the assessed needs of the young people. The current arrangement is that the three assistant managers temporarily manage the home. Monitoring of the work of the home is carried out by a monthly independent visitor and an assistant manager. The visitor recognises that the home is not run in a way that fully promotes the well-being of the young people. There is also a lack of effective monitoring of the home's records, as noted in the outcome area of staying safe.

An unsettled period in the home has brought with it challenging behaviour which has on occasions led to police involvement. The young people say staff are inconsistent in the way they deal with behaviour and comment; 'the home has gone a bit downhill' and 'one manager makes rules and another one will make another one.'

The home's Statement of Purpose accurately reflects what the home offers and the care provided. This is made available to parents and social workers. The young people's welcome guide provides useful information about services and facilities for young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are treated as individuals and their needs are well-considered. Staff help to improve the life chances of young people, particularly through the promotion of education and health. The chairperson of the county

council corporate parenting board is a regular visitor to the home and a champion on their behalf. Young people talk openly to them and make their views known.

Young people are looked after by a caring staff team and the majority have a relevant childcare qualification. Although permanent staff are employed in the home there is also regular use of casual care staff. The frequent use of casual care staff does not always provide the same level of continuity as that given by the permanent staff team.

Staff consider they have good access to training. This is varied and assists them to gain skills and competencies relating to their work with the young people.

Young people's progress is appropriately and permanently documented. Records are securely stored and contain good evidence of their history and development.

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 Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
22	consider the effectiveness and the consequence of disciplinary measures (Regulation 17.4)	21 June 2010
27	ensure as part of the recruitment process that full employment history is obtained for all staff (Regulation 26)	21 June 2010
34	ensure the home is managed with sufficient care, competence and skill (Regulation 9.1)	21 June 2010
34	maintain the system for monitoring the quality of care provided in the home, in particular the disciplinary measures records. (Regulation 34.1)	21 June 2010

Recommendations

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

- maintain the home in a good state of structural and decorative repair, in particular the bathrooms (NMS 24.3)
- ensure guidance is implemented in practice in relation to the amount of medication and date when brought into the home (NMS 13.10)
- provide lockable or otherwise safe storage for young people's personal possessions (NMS 24.5)
- ensure there is a comprehensive plan for young people preparing to leave care which is implemented in practice and specifies the support and assistance they will need. (NMS 6.1)