

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Monica Hargreaves
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Date of last inspection	5 February 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, and with easy access to schools, shops and leisure facilities. The standard of the accommodation is good, with sufficient communal and private space to meet the needs of the six young people.

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

Summary

At this unannounced key inspection, all of the minimum standards in all outcome areas were considered, to assess how well the home supports children and young people placed there. In addition, the action and recommendations made at the previous inspection were reviewed.

Young people are well looked after. They benefit from being cared for by an established team of staff who work well together and who are properly trained and supported. Young people's health needs are well met and staff promote their education. Staff work hard to protect young people from harm. They provide clear boundaries in the home and help young people to learn to manage risk in their own lives. Relationships between young people and staff are positive, so that they feel confident with staff and comfortable in the home.

The acting manager provides effective leadership in the home. However, the fact that there has been no registered manager at this service for over two years, is a significant breach of regulation, which affects the overall judgement for the home.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The action that was made at the last inspection is not yet met. The current acting manager is starting the process of registration with Ofsted, but as this is not yet fully under way, the action will be carried forward.

Four recommendations made at the last visit have all been met.

The young person's guide to the service has been produced, with the full involvement of young people, so that any young person coming to live at the home has access to written information about how the home works. Young people discuss their placement plans with staff and are encouraged to sign them, so that they are fully involved in planning their care. As well as keeping records of menus that are planned, staff record the meals that young people have eaten, so that they can monitor the quality of their diet. Logs of fire drills now show the time of the evacuation, to demonstrate that at least one of these take place at night, so that young people and staff know how to evacuate the building at night time.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The home has sound policies and good care practices which ensure that the good health of young people is promoted. For example, detailed health plans which are based on thorough assessments, enable staff to identify young people's health needs and monitor their progress. All young people are registered with primary health care services and are supported at appointments. Staff give young people good advice about issues that affect their health, such as the risks attached to smoking or using substances and the importance of diet and exercise. The home has good links with health professionals outside the home, and the Looked After Children (LAC) nurse visits the home regularly, so that young people have access to any additional health service they may need.

Young people are provided with a balanced and nutritious diet, which also promotes their good health. Staff are sensitive to the need to provide meals that reflect the young people's preferences and their cultural and religious requirements. They encourage young people to choose menus and to be involved in preparing meals, so that they learn how to improve their own diet.

Procedures for the safe storage and administration of medication are robust, so that young people are protected and their welfare is promoted. Staff have a good understanding of the medication plans and routines that young people have and monitor their welfare closely. Records are well ordered and are regularly checked by the manager. Staff are trained in first aid procedures, so that young people are well cared for in an emergency.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people are cared for safely in the home and protected from abuse and bullying. For example, staff are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse. They have a good understanding of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people and a clear procedure to follow. Staff also have a sound understanding of issues relating to bullying. They make it clear to young people that bullying is not tolerated in the home, monitor the behaviour of young people towards one another, so that they can identify concerns and respond to them promptly. Young people report that bullying is not an issue.

Staff help young people to understand and to manage risk in their own lives. For example they talk to them about the risks associated with absconding from the home and encourage them to work with agreed curfew times, so that staff know when they are returning to the home. If a young person goes missing, staff follow a clear protocol, which includes attending multi agency planning meetings, to protect and support young people. The protocol requires placing social workers to visit young people when they return, to talk about the reasons for their absence. Information from this inspection indicates that these visits do not always take place. Records are kept of all incidents of unauthorised absences. These are clear, but do not include any comments made by young people to care staff when they return to the home.

There is evidence that young people understand the home's complaints procedure and feel confident about using it. Staff encourage young people to let them know if there is a problem, so that they can deal with difficulties at an early stage.

The privacy of young people is properly respected. They have a key to their bedrooms, so that they can keep their possessions safe, they are able to make and receive telephone calls in private and information about them is kept confidential.

Young people are treated with dignity and respect and staff encourage them to understand and respect the rights of others, both inside the home and in the community. Staff work with young people to help them to develop behaviour that is socially acceptable. Care staff are trained to respond positively to behaviour that is challenging, including in the use of physical restraints. It is clear from evidence seen in this visit, that physical intervention is only ever used as a last resort, which promotes the welfare of young people. Sanctions are appropriate and are applied fairly to all young people. Relationships between young people and staff are generally good. Observations made during this inspection are that young people are confident with staff and that staff respond very well to them. They provide young people with appropriate and fair boundaries to protect them and to help them in their interactions inside and outside the home.

The home is kept safe to protect young people. All equipment and installations are checked and fire drills take place regularly, so that young people know what to do in an emergency. Staff monitor the building and supervise young people at a level that is appropriate to their age and their individual needs. The house is secure and the identity of all visitors is checked, so that unauthorised people cannot gain access to the building.

Staff recruitment and selection procedures are robust. All staff are properly vetted to ensure that they are safe to work with vulnerable young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Staff have a very good understanding of the diverse needs of the young people they look after and make sure that they have the individualised support they need. Young people are also referred for any additional support they may need from agencies outside the home, for example, from services working with substance misuse or those providing psychological support.

The importance of education is promoted in the home and staff work hard to encourage and support daily attendance at school or college. Many of the young people who come to live at the home have had disrupted patterns of education and are not in mainstream school placements. Staff work closely with workers from the education support team, to identify appropriate resources for these young people and they provide facilities in the home and emotional support to young people, to help them to engage with education. If they are not attending a school or college, young people have private tuition in the home and staff encourage them to develop aspirations for their future work and training. Every success is recognised and praised, so that young people can be encouraged to continue with their education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Admissions to the home are carefully planned. Detailed information is obtained on young people before they come to live at the home, so that staff can ascertain whether or not they can meet their individual needs and so that they can assess the impact a young person may have on the group of young people already in the home. This promotes the welfare of every young person.

Young people also leave the home in a planned way, so that they are properly supported during a period of transition.

Detailed individual plans are developed with the full involvement of young people, to enable staff to provide the appropriate support to young people and so that they can help young people achieve their objectives. Plans are regularly reviewed so that the progress of young people is monitored and plans can be updated as required. Young people are fully involved in the reviewing process so that their views are taken into account when decisions are made about their lives.

Young people are also encouraged to make their views known about the running of the home. Staff use house meetings, key work sessions and informal discussions with young people as opportunities to ask them for their opinions on things such as activities, menus and plans for the home. The manager has recently consulted with young people about the types of sanctions they feel would be most appropriate, which has helped them to think about the impact of their behaviour on others in the home and to take responsibility for the outcome. Young people say that they are able to talk to staff and that staff listen to and take account of their views.

Staff work well with the local authority's contact plans to promote and support positive contact between young people and their families and friends, to enable young people to keep in touch with individuals outside the home who are important to them. They also monitor the quality of such contact, so that young people are protected.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The daily life of the home enables all young people to develop practical skills that will help them in later life, for example, planning menus, cooking, keeping their rooms clean and tidy. As young people get older, staff look to develop their skills further in preparation for leaving care. Staff make sure that, where appropriate, there is a pathway plan in place for young people, specifying the support and assistance they will receive when they leave care.

Young people benefit from living in comfortable and homely accommodation. Repairs and redecoration are attended to promptly, so that the house and garden are well maintained. Young people said that they like the house and it is apparent that they feel comfortable in the home and take a pride in their environment. Some of the young people have plans to turn over part of the garden to a vegetable plot, so that they can help to grow their own vegetables.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The home's statement of purpose is clear and detailed and accurately describes the work that the home sets out to do with young people. It is regularly updated. Since the last inspection, staff have developed a new young person's guide to the service, with the full involvement of young people themselves. This document is clearly written and gives young people good information about how the home works and about the staff who will look after them.

Young people benefit from being cared for by a team of staff who are known to them and who are qualified and appropriately trained to meet their needs. Young people themselves comment that they get on with staff and can talk to them and this is confirmed in observations made

during the inspection. Having an established team of staff provides young people with consistency. Records confirm that there are always sufficient staff on duty to make sure that young people are cared for properly and to enable staff to attend meetings and complete necessary paperwork. Staff attend team meetings regularly. These are used to help staff to reflect on practice and discuss the progress of all the young people.

Robust management systems ensure that the work of the home is properly monitored. The manager checks records regularly and provides monthly reports on those checks to the senior management team in the organisation. Another manager within the authority, who has no connection to the home, also undertakes monthly checks on records and talks to staff and young people, so that there is an independent scrutiny of the work of the home. Records confirm that issues raised during these checks are responded to promptly to maintain good standards in the home.

Young people's files are well ordered, contain detailed information and are stored securely to protect young people's right to confidentiality. Information from other records is cross referenced in files, so that young people have access to a written record of their history in care and in this placement.

The acting manager of the home is appropriately qualified and experienced and provides good leadership. The care staff feel that they are well supported in their work. However, the home has been without a registered manager for over two years. Although the local authority is now taking steps to register the acting manager, the application process has not yet started. The lack of a registered manager is a significant breach of regulation which affects the overall judgement for this outcome area.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The authority has a range of policies relating to issues of diversity and equality, to support and guide staff and training on issues of diversity is given to all staff. Care staff have a sound knowledge of the young people they look after and demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring that every young person is cared for in a way that meets their individual and specific needs and that all young people are treated fairly.

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
34	ensure that the manager is registered with Ofsted. (Regulation 7)	21 September 2009

Recommendations

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

- keep a record of conversations that are held with young people when they return to the home after an unauthorised absence. (NMS 19.6).