

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

The home is a large, modern house situated in a residential area. It is close to local recreational, health and educational facilities. The communal areas of the home include the lounge, dining room, kitchen, activity room, computer room, bathrooms, laundry and garage with gym equipment. All young people have their own bedrooms.

There are two staff sleeping-in rooms and a staff office. The home offers placements for up to four young people from 14 to 17 years of age. The length of stay is based on an assessment of need.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The purpose of this unannounced visit was to monitor the home's performance against the key standards in the national minimum standards for children's homes, and monitor the progress made in meeting the recommendation made at the last inspection. All key standards have been inspected along with standard 15, which relates to leisure, and standard 28, which relates to staff support. Pre-inspection information was provided by the Registered Manager and questionnaires were received from staff, young people and social workers.

This inspection found outcomes for children are outstanding and the service meets and exceeds many of the national minimum standards. The home is well managed and staff are supported, experienced and trained. The management and staff provide a very positive environment where young people feel safe, receive good support, health care and are encouraged to develop their independence and individuality. Education is valued and young people have excellent leisure opportunities. Behaviour is well managed and there are good relationships between the staff and young people. There is an inconsistency in the record keeping regarding key worker sessions, but this does not impact on the otherwise excellent care experienced by young people. One recommendation is made against the outcome area of enjoying and achieving.

Improvements since the last inspection

One recommendation was made at the previous inspection with regard to assessing the effectiveness and consequence of any sanction given. This recommendation was addressed immediately. The manager monitors closely the effectiveness of sanctions. She has open discussions with staff to look at the effectiveness and find alternative solutions to managing behaviours.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Meal times are an important social time where staff and young people sit and eat together. The young people speak positively regarding the meals and choices that they are given. The cook, supported by management and staff, continues to promote healthy eating and encourages young people to understand the benefits of a healthy diet. Improvements made to the menus now show all meals available. They provide young people with a varied and balanced diet and special diets and cultural needs are catered for. Resources are available for the cook to access if any additional nutritional or dietary information is required. There is a very relaxed atmosphere at the home and young people enjoy spending time in the kitchen with the cook preparing snacks and meals and learning new skills. All staff at the home are trained in basic food hygiene and this qualification is now available for young people to complete if they choose to do so. A recent visit from environmental health awarded the home a 'Scores on Doors Gold Award' for cleanliness, food hygiene, the standard of facility and management. This excellent practice ensures that the welfare of young people is promoted because they are provided with a well-balanced diet that caters for their dietary or cultural needs.

The health needs of young people are promoted positively. Comprehensive and up-to-date health plans are completed and maintained to ensure that both the specialist and routine health needs of young people are identified and met. The management and staff continue to work in partnership with a range of health professionals to support individual young people. Staff are focused on ensuring young people's needs are addressed and exploring creative ways to engage young people in seeking medical advice and treatment when they choose not to attend their appointments. For example, the looked after children's nurse is a regular visitor to the home and will offer advice and support to young people who are reluctant to visit the doctor.

Leaflets on a range of subjects are available at the home and staff spend time with individual young people explaining the benefits of living a healthy life style and addressing any areas of concern.

Good systems and excellent monitoring takes place to ensure that the welfare of young people is effectively promoted through the home's policies and procedures for the safe handling, disposal, storage and administration of medication. Separate medication files are maintained containing medical consents, current medical information and a recent photograph of the young person. In addition to the Registered Manager, the pharmacy inspector continues to monitor and audit the system. Any recommendations made at these audits are immediately implemented as the Registered Manager is keen to continually develop and improve practice at the home. All staff are trained in the safe handling of medication and refresher courses are also available.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There continues to be excellent systems in place to ensure that young people know what to do if they are unhappy about anyone or anything. Complaints are managed through the provider's complaints department who work with the Registered Manager to resolve any concerns. Young people are kept informed of the actions taken and the outcomes of their complaints. Information is provided in a variety of ways to young people, who state that they feel confident that they will be listened to and action will be taken to address any concerns that they may have. In addition to the management and staff who will advocate on behalf of the young people, an independent advocate is also a regular visitor to the home. Young people confirm that they are aware of the role of the advocate. There is evidence available that this advocacy service is effectively used. The welfare of young people is promoted and safeguarded because they are clear about how to make a complaint. There is an effective and robust system in place to record, address and resolve any concerns made known by young people.

The commitment and stability of the management and staff team enable them to continue to work in partnership and maintain strong relationships with other professionals to ensure that they are proactive in promoting child protection. Staff demonstrate an excellent awareness of the safeguarding procedures and a knowledge and understanding of the implementation of these procedures in their day-to-day work. Staff actively encourage young people to keep themselves safe. Information and guidance are available and professionals, such as the fire service, police, health workers and the youth offending team visit the home and discuss areas of concern with either individuals or groups of young people. All staff are trained in basic child protection. Training is ongoing and staff progress to a higher level once they have completed the basic training. The Registered Manager monitors the training closely to ensure that staff knowledge is regularly updated and refreshed.

A protocol for young people going absent without permission remains in place with the police. Clear instructions are available on young people's files regarding when they should be reported missing. Staff have a good understanding and knowledge of the young people in their care. They are aware of the risks, timescales and guidance in place for reporting individuals missing. Strong relationships formed with the local community police provide a positive and supportive service for the staff and young people at the home.

The welfare of young people is safeguarded because robust systems are in place to ensure that young people are protected from bullying. Pre-inspection questionnaires and discussions with young people confirm that staff promote an anti-oppressive atmosphere. Young people state that they feel safe and believe that any concern raised with regard to bullying would be immediately addressed. Detailed risk assessments identify any areas of concern and pre-admission assessments include the impact a placement may have on the other young people living at the home.

It is evident that staff work well as a team and form positive relationships with the young people. The atmosphere at the home is relaxed and the emphasis amongst the staff team is to defuse any potentially difficult and challenging situations. Staff receive the appropriate training and this enables them to manage situations with skill and confidence. Detailed behaviour management plans are in place. Staff demonstrate an excellent knowledge of these plans and understand the needs of the individual young people that they care for. Appropriate and detailed records are maintained of any restraints or sanctions implemented. The Registered Manager monitors these records closely to assess the effectiveness of the sanction and is proactive in addressing any area she feels requires alternative action.

Young people's protection is further supported by good health and safety routines. There is a designated member of staff responsible for health and safety. Regular fire tests and drills take place and equipment is checked and serviced within the required timescales.

A sample of recruitment files for staff employed in the provider's five children's homes were examined at the Human Resources department during July 2010. Records are well maintained of staff Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and a system to ensure that they are renewed every three years is in place. All files contain application forms, a full work history, CRB checks and reference requests. Some concerns were identified during this visit regarding the verification of references and the inconsistencies in filing information. An action plan received from the provider addressed all the concerns raised. The Registered Manager is also able to demonstrate the action taken to address the shortfalls and is actively involved and trained in the recruitment process. All visitors to the home are signed in and where appropriate identification is requested. The provider ensures that the recruitment policy is effectively implemented and this protects and safeguards young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff ensure that they have a good knowledge and understanding of the young people who they care for. They work closely with the young people to develop supportive and caring relationships that address individual needs. This includes their cultural, religious and dietary needs, any weaknesses identified within the staff knowledge are immediately addressed and staff work in partnership with other professionals to ensure that young people receive an excellent and appropriate support service. Key workers spend time with young people and give them the opportunity to share their views and wishes. This results in staff providing flexible support that is shaped to suit each young person's circumstances. Although there is evidence that key worker sessions take place regularly the method for recording these sessions is not always consistent.

The Registered Manager and staff team are keen to promote the benefits of education for young people. Good links are in place with the education services to

ensure that places are secured for young people in both mainstream school and alternative education or work scheme placements. All young people living at the home have an education provision and staff actively encourage young people to attend their placements and support them when they are having difficulties. Personal education plans are available on young people's files which are reviewed and updated regularly.

Young people are involved in a range of activities, individual hobbies and interests are well supported and holidays are planned around the needs of the young people. This may result in separate holidays to cater for interests. For example, during the summer period some young people experienced an adventure activity holiday, some had a caravan holiday in Wales while others went to Blackpool. The manager continues to take an active interest in the local community by being a member of the local neighbourhood Police And Communities Together. Meetings look at the problems in the neighbourhood and work with members of the local community to look at the issues and offer solutions. She is keen to address any concerns that may arise and ensure that young people are learning and developing an understanding of living as part of a community. Young people enjoy helping at the local church fete and are involved in charity work throughout the year. For example, they are currently collecting for the shoe box appeal. Young people speak positively of the activities and personal interests and enjoy discussing the experiences and interests they have. The Registered Manager is always looking at new experiences for young people to participate in and they take an active role in suggesting ideas for the manager and staff to pursue. Young people chose all the entertainment booked for a fun day that was held at the home, which included drum and dancing lessons and a bouncy castle. Staff, young people's friends or family and professionals were all invited to join in the activities. Young people's social skills are well promoted as they are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and make individual choices regarding their social outings and activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Detailed and robust placement plans are completed to cover all aspects of young people's lives and identify how their needs will be met. These include any additional services and support that arise out of a young person's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, faith or belief. Young people are encouraged to take an active role in the completion of their plans and have a good knowledge and understanding of the plans in place and the decisions being made that affect their lives. Reviews take place regularly and young people are encouraged to attend. Good support systems are available for young people if they feel that they are unable to attend their reviews. Key workers spend time with individuals to ensure that they represent the young person's views and wishes; in addition, an independent advocate is available. The reviewing officer also visits the young person to inform them of the review outcome. The home's records comprehensively evidence young people's views and the feedback they get from staff.

Contact arrangements are discussed at the time of admission and reviewed regularly. Young people benefit from living in a home that places a high importance on helping them to stay in touch with people who are included in their plans. Young people have a clear understanding of the contact arrangements for friends and families and are fully supported to stay in touch with significant people in their lives.

The Registered Manager is committed to creating an environment where young people are consulted and take an active role in the day-to-day living arrangements at the home. Staff are sensitive and aware of the need to listen to young people. The positive relationships between staff and young people are evident; young people believe that staff listen and consider their suggestions and where possible implement their ideas. Young people state that they are happy and feel safe at the home and one young person said: 'the staff are the best', and they help them and treat them well.

Good systems are in place to ensure that young people move into and out of the home in a planned way. The management and staff remain committed to supporting the young people who have moved out as this step to independence can be a difficult, challenging and a lonely experience for many young people. Although there is no formal system in place for aftercare support from the staff at the home, former residents keep regular contact and visit the staff for advice and guidance. The Registered Manager remains committed to offer this facility for young people and where appropriate would like to develop the service further to offer outreach work for young people who have lived at the home.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

All young people complete independence tasks dependant on their age and ability. The Registered Manager is keen to ensure that young people are gradually equipped for moving on towards independence. Young people work through specific areas such as personal hygiene, cooking, basic shopping and budgeting. Young people speak positively about spending time in the kitchen with the cook and developing their culinary skills. This prepares young people for working with the leaving care team who are actively involved at the home and assist young people to prepare their pathway plans. Pre-inspection questionnaires received from professionals praise the excellent service provided at the home to the young people.

Young people are provided with homely, well-furnished accommodation. The home is maintained to a high standard providing adequate space for young people. Bedrooms are personalised and young people take an active role in decisions made regarding the improvement and development of the home and garden. They are involved in choosing colour schemes and furnishings for their rooms and communal areas. The management and staff ensure that any damage is immediately repaired or replaced and are proactive in ensuring that the home remains comfortable, homely and welcoming. The garden is well maintained with a pagoda and decking.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it provides young people, their families and professionals with up-to-date information about the home to enable them to make an informed choice. An excellent handbook is available for young people which includes information regarding all aspects of the home.

There are systems in place to ensure that all staff receive regular monthly supervision. Sessions are based on the needs of the individual staff and if required, additional or longer time slots are allocated. Sessions do not always last the allotted one and a half hours. However, group sessions and daily contact with the manager address any shortfalls. Staff speak positively with regard to the support that they receive from the management at the home and they feel confident to approach the manager at any time for advice and guidance. Rotas provide adequate cover and senior staff are available on each shift. An out-of-hours emergency service is also in place. A strength of the home is the commitment of the staff and management to work as a team and provide a consistent approach to young people. Staff meetings are well structured and take place on a regular basis. They provide staff with opportunities to discuss practice in an open and professional way. Guest speakers attend staff meetings from a range of services.

Young people benefit from staff who are well supported and committed to regularly attend training to update and improve their knowledge and practice. Although there are currently no new staff working at the home a detailed induction programme is in place. Staff changes are minimal and therefore young people are cared for by a well-established, stable and consistent staff team. Training is supported and encouraged. Staff are trained to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. Senior staff are trained to NVQ level 4 in Caring for Children and Young People. All staff have completed their mandatory training. The Registered Manager monitors the training records to ensure that regular refresher training takes place. Staff appraisals are completed annually and identify any training needs. In addition to the mandatory training a range of specialist training is also available. Staff talk positively of the opportunities that they have to update and improve their knowledge. The Registered Manager is motivated to continually develop the service delivered to young people by improving the knowledge and skills of both herself and the staff team. The home is currently being monitored as a comparison home as part of the government's current pilot project to implement the application of social pedagogy planning into children's homes.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Young people benefit from living in a home where the Registered Manager and staff team are committed to meeting the different needs of each young person. Staff are well informed about young people's needs in relation to their identity and backgrounds and are fully aware of how to help and support them in a fair and non-judgemental way.

There are good systems in place to monitor the daily lives of the young people currently living in the home. Regulation 33 visits are undertaken monthly to monitor the overall care and welfare of the young people. The Registered Manager responds immediately to any actions raised from these visits. Through regulation 34 checks the Registered Manager takes an active role in the evaluation of the service and the impact the home is having on outcomes for each young person. Young people's files are well structured, contain relevant information and are stored in an appropriate and safe place.

There are policies, procedures and guidance for staff available in all outcome areas. Staff are able to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of these policies and implement them in their daily routines. This practice promotes and safeguards the welfare of young people.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there are systems in place, with particular regard to the recording of key worker sessions to ensure that children's opinions are sought over key decisions that affect their daily lives and future. (NMS 8.1)